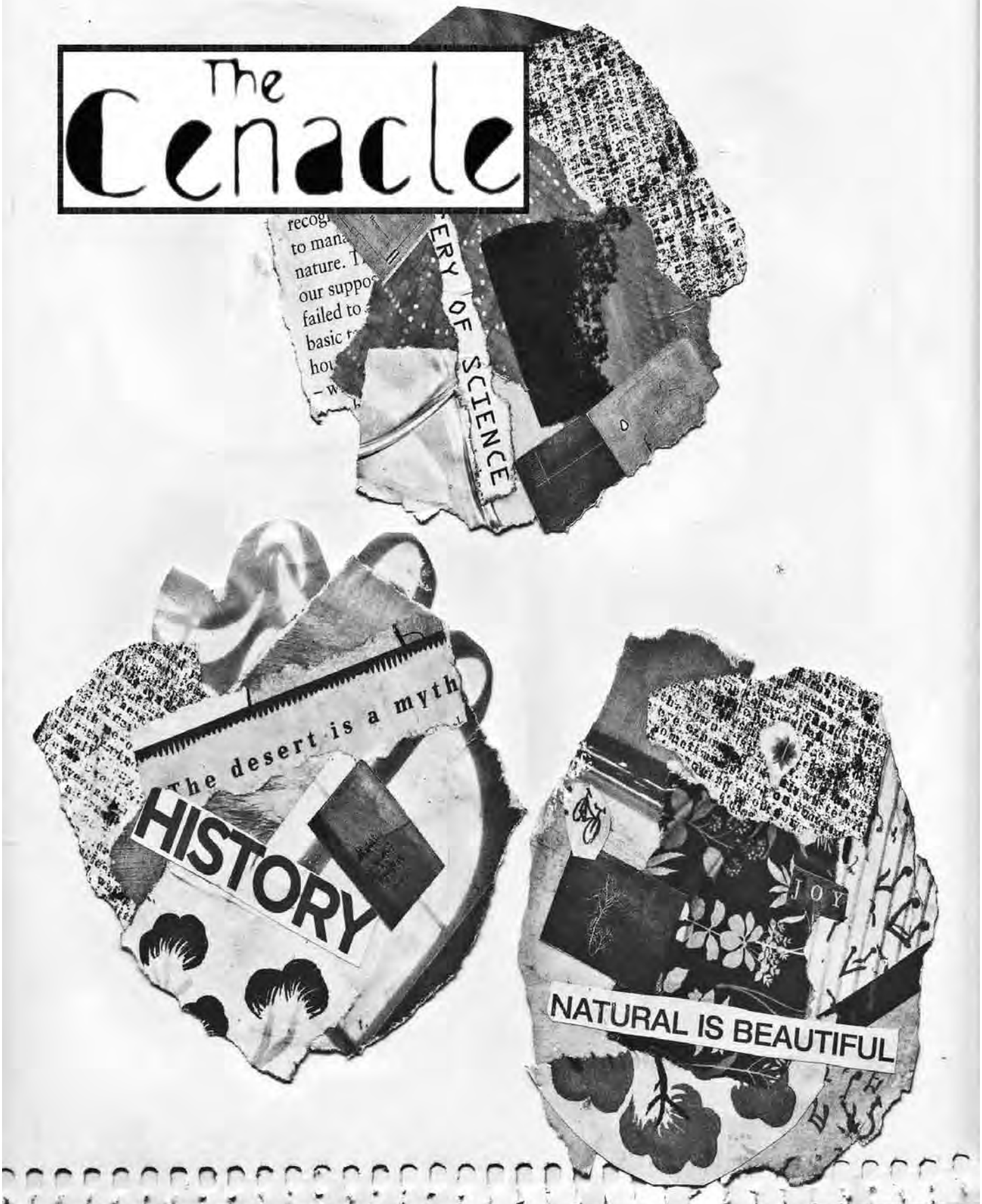
The Cenacle



Number 78 | June 2011

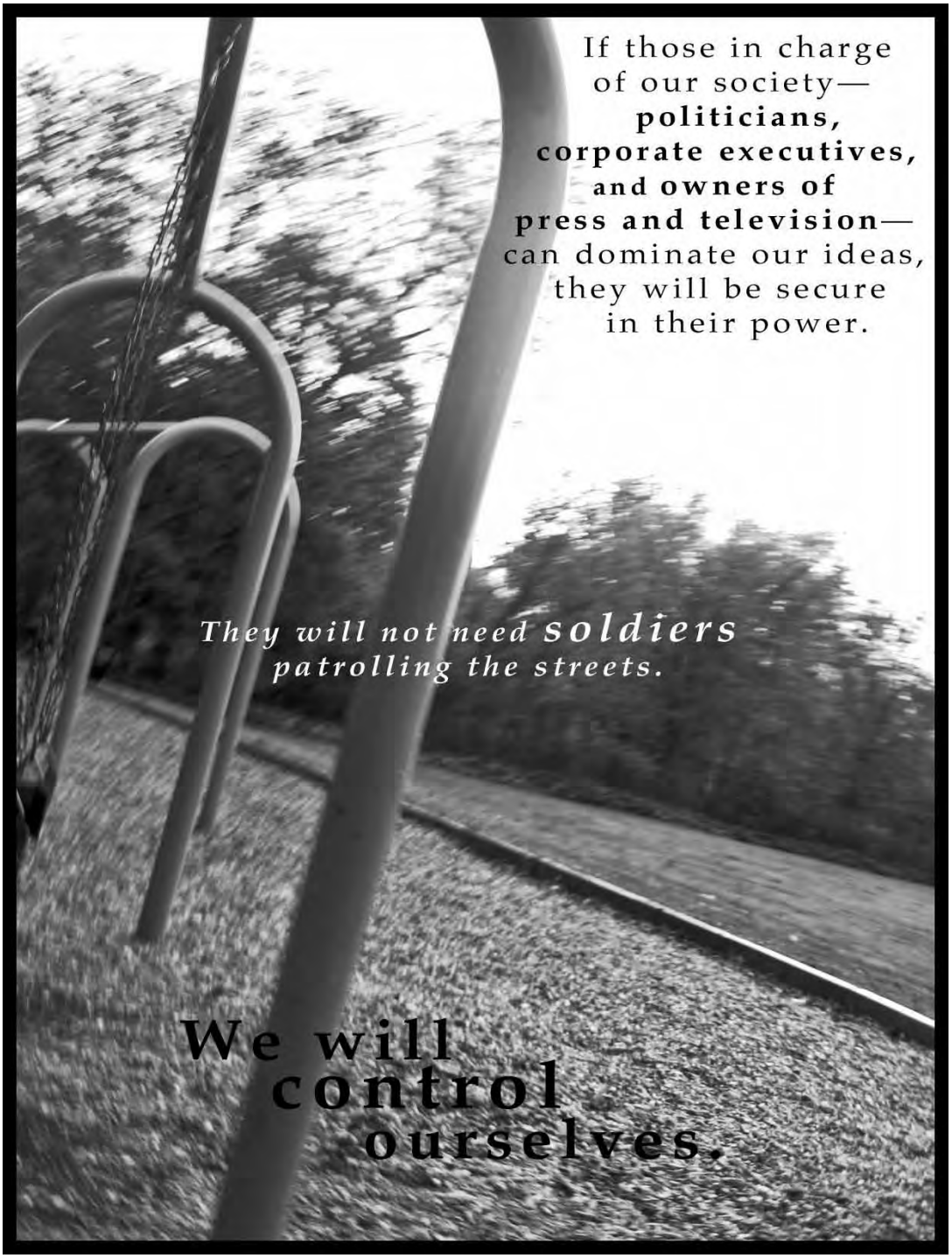
"To be hopeful is not just foolishly romantic.
It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty,
but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness."

-- Howard Zinn, 1994.

June 18, 2011
4:38 p.m.
Marriott Hotel at
Copley Place-lounge
Boston, MA.

Start closely, nearly, with the recurring dream of electronic page, extending into the night, through blankets, its stress, what coin cultures works to compel but... even to waking dreams? It is mine but maybe not mine alone, the pressure to work daily like there aren't clowns commanding nations & armies, & more pressing for a go, & the newspapers lose dulled even of the years-long bloodshed 'cross the globe, rather to headline the errant shake of a cock, & the question may best be said thus: who would seriously regard any of these institutions if they did not hold the guns?

So I wonder in these days passing from spring to summer. There are far more words counseling a sense of diminished prospects, of hunkering down for long times of want to come. It's as

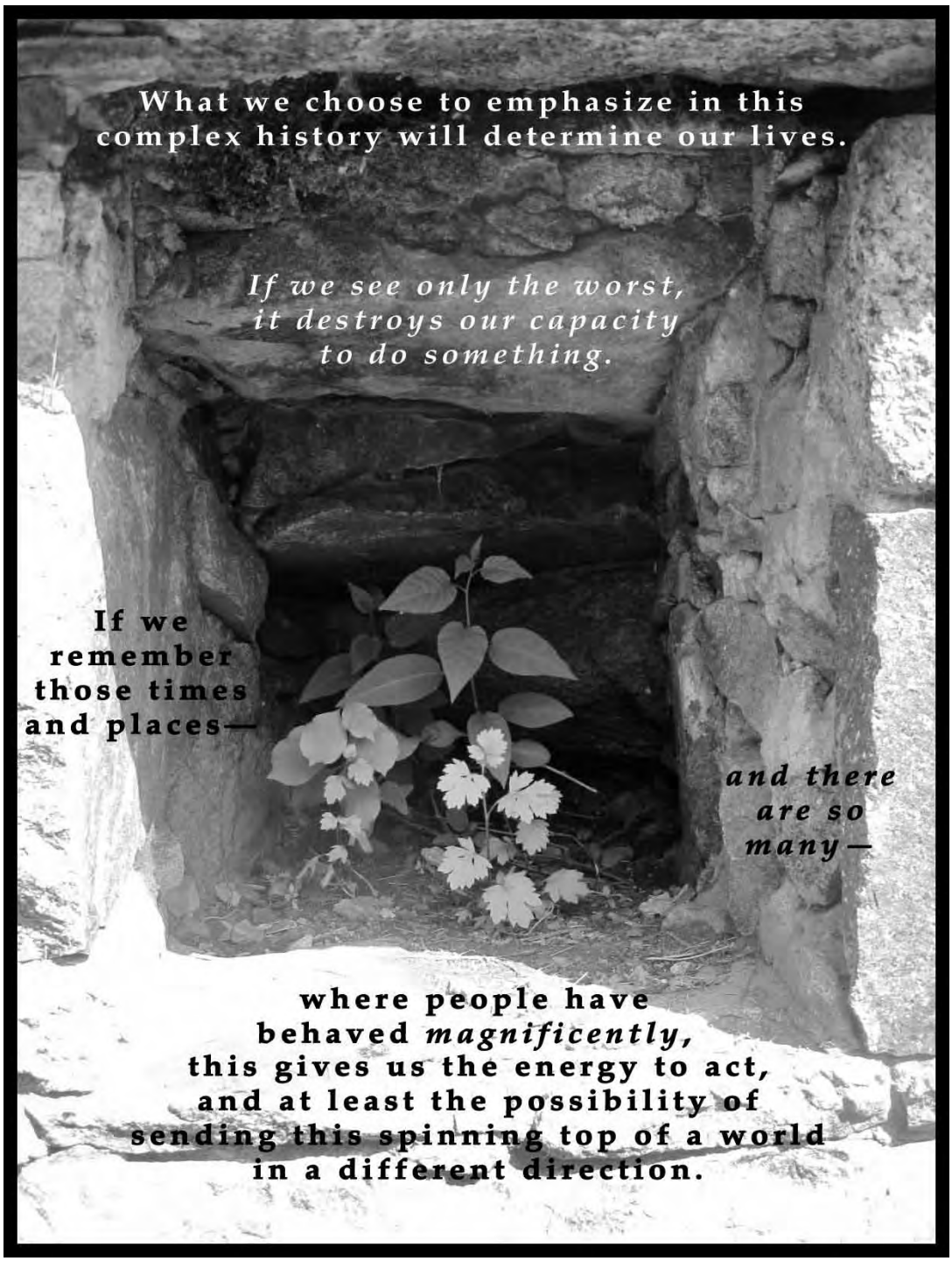

If those in charge
of our society—
politicians,
corporate executives,
and owners of
press and television—
can dominate our ideas,
they will be secure
in their power.
They will not need **soldiers**
patrolling the streets.
We will
control
ourselves.

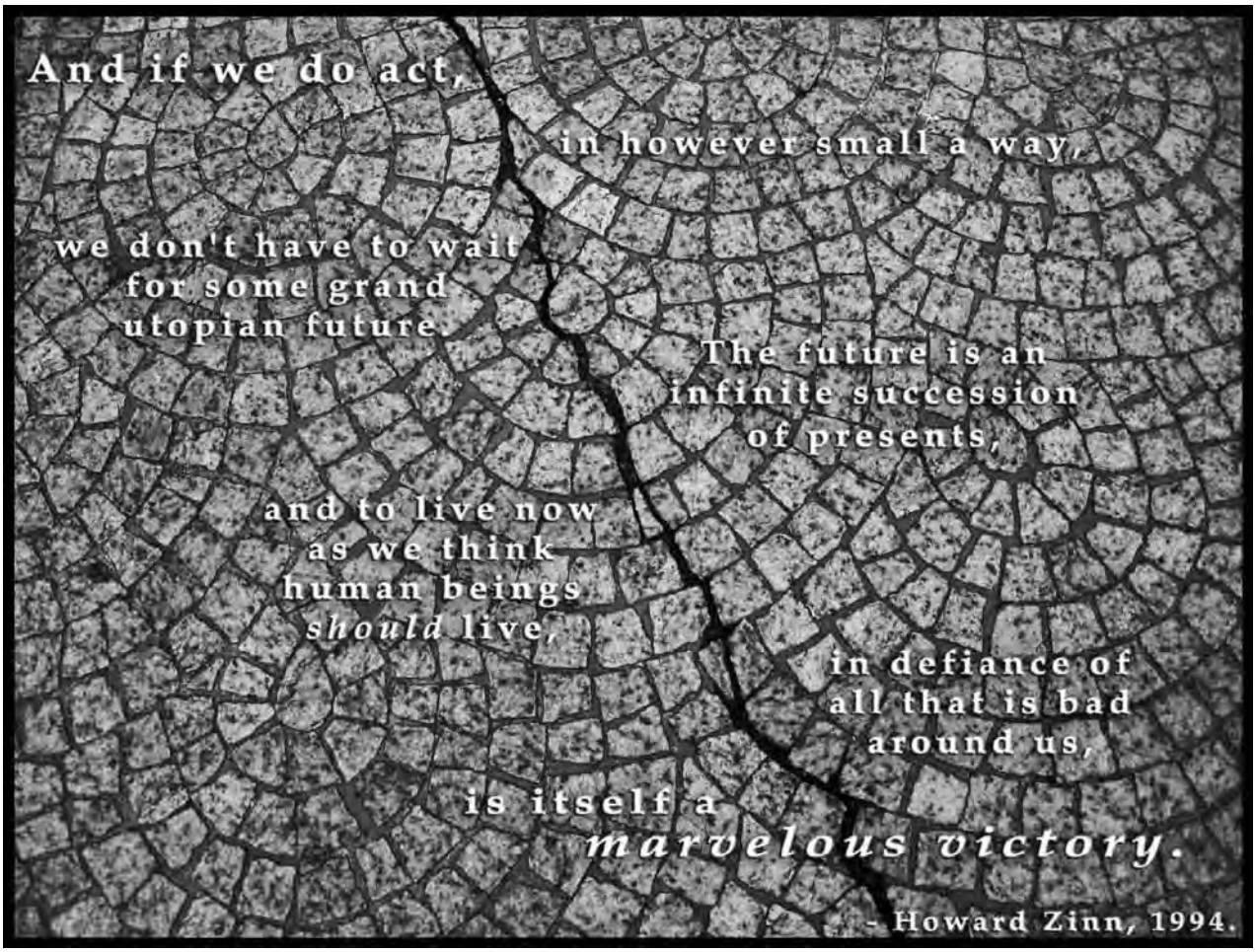
though the powers that be have decided that there's best profit to be gotten in a general atmosphere of scarcity, fear of worse to come, skepticism of hopeful voices or new ideas. I wonder can this be possible, to convince otherwise thriving parts of the world that these are times of recession, even depression, that good governance means there is less to spread around, to share, certainly less time & fewer resources to devote to retarding human suffering & global environmental destruction. Now is a time for a reinforced military, an ever-more-fortified minority of wealthy individuals & families.

Say it: these are hard times. Say again: these are hard times. It gets easier. Hard times. More expensive resources, suddenly rarer. Hard times. Less innovation for alternatives innovation. Hard times. A push toward religious fundamentalism, return to "values of some other time. Hard times. No times for the rights of the vulnerable, the different, the old,

the sick. Hard times. Yet some go on making the kind of money necessary to erode the laws that prevent them from making even more money while enforcing an atmosphere of scarcity & suffering that most of the world's population must endure?

Simply ask: who profits by whose suffering? And are they sufficiently in ownership of the governments armies, & mass media necessary to portray these times as hard ones? I don't think the answers will ever stay nakedly clear because the rot is embedded in the institutionalized systems of powers themselves. Empires consume themselves, lastly. The difficult thing to see that what exists now is not the Roman Empire or British Empire, but the Empire of Men. Power over the planet & the lives of billions that it can no longer be paused out to identify a king or a nation. There is no longer a pretense of opposing philosophies of governance. There is simply jostling for greater pieces of the pie.


What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives.
If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something.
If we remember those times and places—
and there are so many—
where people have behaved *magnificently*, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction.


And if we do act,
in however small a way,
we don't have to wait
for some grand
utopian future.
The future is an
infinite succession
of presents,
and to live now
as we think
human beings
should live,
in defiance of
all that is bad
around us,
is itself a
marvelous victory.
- Howard Zinn, 1994.

So what, then? If a pseudo-democratic world empire of guns & resources exists, if the differences among nations &, within nations, among political parties is a ruse, a spangled lie, what then?

Some will counsel slumbering with dreams of last days. The world will burn, or pass away, or its promised savior will return in glory & light. Or the aliens will land. Something. Dreams & cries of the helpless, the very-slowly-drowning.

So here is what I've got. I say no, tonight, hereon, to my dreams of the electronic cage. I say no, because no is a place to start, it's what I've got to hand, it's my stone to throw in this prison of glass, willing to show the plentiful, brilliant, miraculous world but then turn faces away & say, no, it's not so much there anymore, there's less of it for us, look down, look down. Yes, the world is what to dream of, its riches, its goodness, but look down, look down.

Say no. It's simple, it's hard. It's terrifying. What reward? Sometimes little. Almost none. But something. Maybe the bones must harden again, say no, here, there, push, back off, but again, no. No. Something gives way, a bit, a convulse, a crack, not often, not for long, but see it. It is a very real Empire, world-wide, & yet. And yet. The power of no. Again. Again. Thrown stone in the Prison of Glass. The free air before the pane is patched.

Say no until you are ready to say yes. It will come too. In as many ways, as many thousand little ways. Nor will it supplant the will & wish to say no. The fully conscious human animal will choose to say one or the other, or neither. Making the choice in all. Saying with or against others, each & every time. Thinking choosing, speaking, each & every time. Feel that shake? That convulse? It's the sound of this very real & quite illusory Empire shaking a little. Wondering how much you know. How long you can hold out. How many others.

6-18-2021

The Cenacle

Number 78 | June 2011

Edited by Raymond Soulard Jr.

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Soulard

A Travel to Belize [Journal]
by Charlie Beyer 1

Many Musics [Poetry]
by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 11

Excerpts from Walden; or, Life in the Woods [Classic Essay]
by Henry David Thoreau 25

Poetry
by Judih Haggai 43

Notes from New England [Commentary]
by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 49

Poetry
by Martina Newberry 53

Poetry
by Tom Sheehan 57

Labyrinthine [A New Fixtion]
by Raymond Soulard, Jr. 61

Poetry
by Joe Ciccone 105

Poetry
by Ric Amante 106

My Acid Trip With Groucho: See the Sacred Word and Win $100 [Essay]
by Paul Krassner 109

Notes on Contributors 121

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* * * * * *

Charlie Beyer

A Travel To Belize

[Journal]

The emerald sea purrs its relentless surf against the blue sand beach. A lighthouse on a knoll beside sweeps the horizon. A delicious costal wind blows steady over us. Clouds of butterflies, yellow, iridescent blue, fill the air. Huge willowy pines play their tops in the breeze. The temperature is perfect. No mosquitoes. Little crabs shyly poke their heads from holes in the sand to see if we are still too close.

A paradise. A rest from the insanity, the road, the sweat, and the cramped truck cab. Myself as driver, Kim mashed beside me, a cat carrier with the matron grumpy cat (Natts), the dog (Molley) squashed into the passenger floor well, and the little insane kitty (Ruby) wandering free range. Only the AC keeps us from total melt down, but the discomfort level is still close to maximum. Here, for a night on the beach, tent pitched on the soft sand, no other campers . . . 10 US bucks a night. Yeah . . . I could live here. The locals up by the road play their loud Caribbean music late into the night, but it's tempered by the surf. Only the deeper conga comes through. We sleep the sleep of babies. Paradise.

But the price has been dear to get here. Robbery and torture are tame descriptors. For now, these indignities escape my mind as the beautiful wind dries my sweat, our bedding, cleanses our souls.

Kim is happy. A funky banyo with a shower from a pipe washes away her grimy misery. The dog runs a hundred miles per hour up and down the beach, the cats sprawl free a yard long in the tent. Delicate dreams for us in the heavenly air at last, here on the Emerald Coast.

Why this place exists in the center of a thousand miles of *barrio* and corruption in either direction is incomprehensible. Too soon we must leave, return to the prison of the road, the terrifying unknown ahead. No other tourists are here along this 40-mile stretch of hotels, though all are icons of American paradise-myth. Pools and hammocks, camping or luxury if you want it, food of all kinds. A crystal ocean to swim in, sunrises and sets in Maxfield Parrish colors. But impossible to reach.

In the days behind and ahead, the events were thick. This is the story.

To the Border

I am accidentally living the story of the film *Mosquito Coast*. Accidentally because of my disenfranchisement from the corporate capitalist paradigm. We tried to be good Amerikans, Kim and me, her harder than em, working as wage slaves, giving every dime to the mortgages and the money-mongering banks. But they denied us life in this process. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Maybe the first in that we still eat and crap, but not the other two. So now, like Harrison Ford's character Allie Fox, I despise every aspect of this American "culture." We invent our way out of the maze and head for the rivers and lost temples of the Mosquito

Coast. Like Allie Fox, we leave the dishes unwashed in the sink, the TV on the floor in the back room, dog crap on the rug—and walk out into a new beginning. We close the door unlocked at my shack in the desert in Idaho, books full on the shelves, canned food and peanut butter in the pantry, the bed unmade, an offering to the mice that will caretaker the place. Flip the main power breaker, and drive away.

A thousand details for escape: from buying gold to thrashing vet vaccinations. Finally our lives reside in the bed of a truck. The vehicle is crammed with every imaginable device to begin a new life in a new world, from a gas-powered refrigerator to an invented wind power machine. Finally the hour of departure arrives after multiple midnights of packing . . . down into the bowels of Utah we roll. Here the northern ice caps the mountains white, freezing us to the bone at night. The first kiss of winter in this northern world.

Travel troubles come in threes, and we think at the time that they are large, though they now pale in comparison to events since. Running out of gas in the Zion rock cathedrals, the trailer breaking apart in Arizona, and a presumed cat escape in a desert KOA campground. The first is foiled by lucky gas fumes; the second rectified by hooking the truck and hovercraft battery together, and welding the trailer frame with a coat hanger and a handful of bolts; and the cat is recovered at the last minute.

While walking in the morning sun, we hear a huge cat fight eruption back in the direction of our tent where the two felines are confined. Then a dashing fur ball bolts by, through the fence, into the scrub-land beyond. For hours we search for Ruby, wandering amid saguaros, the Yucca, and stink weed, calling, calling, ever calling. The heat rises to its usual hundred. Still going up. No cat to be found. We know Ruby will fry out there today, if not tomorrow. Kim's heart is broken. Her spirit animal of unruly impish behavior has vanished, apparently clawed its way out of the tent in the fray with Natts, the older less interesting bitch. Kim steels her heart. "We must go on," she says. I tell her of the cat Doughnut that ran away

Southern Idaho along the Snake River

at Niagara Falls in an infant family exodus, but it is not story time. Reluctantly, I begin to disassemble the tent. Under the folds of the bedding hides Ruby. Joy is returned. We push on.

The American West is huge, taking us forever to reach El Paso. Though the previous days have seen drug lord gunfights in the streets, all is the usual quiet of USA Inc., everyone shops, drives pell-mell for somewhere. Then Texas, as big as it boasts. 700 miles of near nothingness. We cross the Pecos. Now east of the Pecos. We are no longer in the West. Still 500 miles to the Mexican border.

Arriving in Brownsville in the late afternoon on Friday, we find the Los Indios border crossing down an improbable road. Kim has called ahead from our previous world and discussed "*transmigrantes*"[1] with a customs broker at place called C.A.T.S. (Central American Transmigrante Service). Driving into the one lane road leading to the kiosks, we reconsider and turn around at the last second, back to a gas station. I ask in the mini-mart if there are any custom brokers nearby, but they know nothing of it, nor can understand me. I crap the dog in a field while Kim looks up phone numbers. She calls a place called Peters and Sons, and receives directions. Back onto the freeway to Brownsville, and out into an industrial area. Can't find it. Call again. More instructions. More wandering in the fenced warehouse land. Call again, then it is finally located, their sign overgrown with bushes. It is a staging area fore huge trucks. Wandering the loading docks, we find an office with many Mexicans who ignore us. Finally a fellow talks to us, says that they do not do this, we need this, we must wait 72 hours, and other bad news. He gives us directions to the *transmigrantes* street, apparently lined with those who provide this service. It is about impossible to back the trailer out—it jackknifed and the hover crushes one of the taillights. Out of there, we dig out the paperwork printed from the computer for C.A.T.S. Rainstorms have welded the stack into one brick of paper. The top page is peeled off and the runny ink phone number deciphered. I call.

"*Transmigrantes*," a woman says. "Can I speak to Onhell?" Gibberish, gibberish. Sounds of speaking to someone else. Some rustling and bumping, then a dial tone. Call again, no answer. We resolve to follow the directions to the place.

Weaving through Brownsville, we find the road paralleling the border. The 20-foot steel-barred fence stands off to our left, not looking so very hard to climb over. We are hot and irritated, confused, crammed. Natts is yowling, Molley is thrashing, Ruby keeps leaping between surfaces. On and on the country border road goes. Finally we see a *transmigrantes* sign, half fallen down, overgrown, in front of a mostly fallen shack. Think not. A little further, another. Down the road we see C.A.T.S. We pull in there—it is a huge dirt yard with junkyard cars all around the perimeter. A trailer has an *open* sign in the window, But the door is locked; no one is around. Back to the other place. A couple of shady-looking swarthies in the shade hover near a fancy car. Into that trailer/office. A few very rude Mexicans who don't speak English and just want to get rid of us. We are to understand that Tuesday would be the soonest they will talk to us. Monday being Labor Day.

Dejected and rejected back into the parking lot, a dapper swarthy comes over. "*Habla ingles*?" "*Sí*," he says, and goes on to tell us how he's been there for days, has to wait till Tuesday, and then a 72-hour computer search will commence to clear the title of his car. "*Es nice carro, eh*?" he says, obviously smuggling the stolen black 2010 BMW over to a drug lord. It must

[1] "The people making this arduous trip are known as transmigrantes, a name borrowed from the visa Mexican officials issue to Central Americans who cross Mexican territory with their vehicles. And the Los Indios border crossing west of Harlingen is the only point of entry on the 2,000-mile border where Mexican officials allow *transmigrantes* to enter." —James Pinkerton, "Border Checkpoint," *Houston Chronicle*, 12/23/2005.

take less time to make the new title and cook the paperwork, but 72 hours is the official hoop to jump through. He is insistent that we will have to do this also.

Back out onto the road. In a quarter mile we come to the gas station just before the Los Indios border crossing where we were before. How they cannot know about the custom brokers down the street is unfathomable. Knowing that the distance to the first Mexican town is too far away to reach before nightfall, we try it anyway. A toll to get out, across the Rio Grand, and into a nest of ridged machine gun sentries. An officer inspects us suspiciously. After a half-hour of broken communication: "*No passer, no documtaros*" (no passing, no documents). Back across the Rio to USA. Pay a toll to the bankers. We glean that there is no reason to keep us out of Mexico, except that we need all these various fucking permits. The main Matamoras crossing is open 24-7 for documents. Resolved to attack again in the morning, it's an expensive Motel 6 night—animals, cat box, and crap smuggled into the room.

At dawn, we are at the other crossing. No tollbooth here, just seething Homeland Security. They fall on us like bears on a wrecked honey truck. After frisking and fiddling, they decide I'm running guns to the drug lords. We are led (truck, hover, and all) to a huge concrete building where we are told to wait off to the side, both cats in carriers, the dog confused on a leash, the humans chain smoking. They X-ray the whole truck and the hover with a massive machine. Eventually we are returned to the Yankee crossing post. Now they decide I'm delivering cash back to the drug lords. "How much do you have? Where is it? Let us see it." We have the stuff stashed in a dozen places throughout the load. We don't know how much we have. I tell them fifteen grand. Ten is the limit, unless paperwork is filled out to inform the bankers that some one is taking their money. We have to dig it all out. In the carb of the hover, under the battery, in cooking books, in physics text books, some in the door, on and on. Finally there is a huge pile of cash in their kiosk. With relish they count and re-count it, jabbering in Spanish the whole time. Other uniforms rifle through all our crap, pulling apart one thing after another. I have two gold bars under the soles of my feet that I've failed to mention, along with another seven ounces stashed throughout the load. At one point they talk of shoes among them selves, this pair cost this, that . . . American talk. I sweat, but put on the face of an interview with Stalin. They are distracted by finding two Social Security cards of Kim's. Is she going to sell one to the drug lords in Mexico? No, no, no. She's been married four times and this is just residual. "Five times a charm!" They offer cheerily. Yeah, hell yeah. "But, hmmm . . . Señor, there is a major discrepancy. You said fifteen thousand and we only count 10,237 dollars. Where is the rest?" Fuck, I don't know. Maybe that's all I had. They apply their third grade education and consider that we couldn't have spent more than a thousand getting down here from Idaho. Where is the rest? The Easter egg hunt through the truck resumes with vigor. After a spell, they are defeated. Nothing more shows up. I am lectured long about the dangers of Mexico. How I will be murdered and robbed, or maybe robbed and murdered. No night driving. This and that, wash behind my ears. After four hours we are released. All that just to get out of this land of liberty. Back across the Rio Grand into Mexico where it really gets weird.

Oh yeah, pull over here. Officials everywhere but now all in Mexican gibberish. *Qui carga this, nessito documetaro, permito*, etc. etc. A cat makes a flying lung for the open window, but is snatched out of mid-air by my left hand. "*El gato loco*?" Whatever. What now? We take our passports in and get human permits and stamps. Now the vehicular confusion. A greasy pissed-off juvenile bureaucrat abstractedly is the gatekeeper. An insurance rat is hanging

out and speaks some broken English. I am led to his office the size of a bed where he make copies for me for the enormous price of twenty bucks. Back to the punk. Eventually he enters everything into his computer, behind the bullet-proof glass, between stunning moves on his Black Ops action game. I am shoved over some blue paperwork. Into the pile. Back at the truck, I announce I am willing to pay the taxes. Though I had determined that taxes were to be paid at the concrete bunker a hundred feet in front of me, now it is no. "*No paymento*." "OK, where?" A lot of jabbering between two of them. "*No aqui! Quatro Puente. Calle Santa Domingo. TLC!"* What the hell are they talking about? After a one-on-one Spanish-to-English-and-reverse gestating language session, I say "Los Indios?" "*Sí. TLC. Quatro Puente*." "OK.I get it. Fourth bridge crossing at Los Indios. Transmigrantes TLC. I ask, "*Donde esta TLC*?" No intelligible reply. The *transmigrantes* is repeated over and over. "*Puente Los Indios*." Hmmmm. Been there. Then comes the kicker, "No permissimo dos animilotos. Soooorree." What? Only two animals allowed to cross? We have three. Zoological *Sophie's Choice*! Kim is now yelling at the proud official, thankfully in English that the zipper head can't understand. I'm rolling the truck after the guide car to turn us around. Kim is in a horror. Back across the Rio to the Motel 6. Fourth crossing now. What to do with the Sophie's Choice. Whack the cranky old one is the thought. I let her say it. She is depressed. We are exhausted from all day in the pig world. I suggest we check out the *transmigrantes* services anyway. What the hell. If they smooth the trail by one bump, it's worth the price. We get to the main one, C.A.T.S., just before 3 p.m. when they close. In luck, we find Onhell, the fellow Kim previously talked to on the phone. He is leaving. It is quitting time. Come back tomorrow at 8:30 and all will be taken care of. *No problemo* about the herd of animals. Just sent a lady over with five dogs yesterday. All paperwork will be fixed. *Hot damn*. We are happy now. All is saved. At the motel we order a $20 delivered pizza. Tomorrow we get into Mexico. The motel TV is all excited. A huge hurricane is approaching and will slam the coast exactly where we plan to stay the first night in La Pesca. 90 mph winds. This is going to get interesting.

We arrive at C.A.T.S. at 8:30 and are directed to a slot at what appears thankfully to be the front of the line. Onhell soon appears from somewhere and gives us a variety of instructions. We produce a list of all our crap that is looked at with awe, or maybe disgust. Item by item we go through it, showing him this and then that. He records everything in Spanish on some forms, then disappears with our passports and titles. "Wait," he says. In an hour, a runner comes back with the passports and titles. "Wait," he says. I converse brokenly with another *transmigrante* who is heading to Guatemala. There are dozens of us travelers here, all apparently going to Guatemala. Some have big shabby trucks loaded to the limit with unknown cargo, tied redundantly under a tarp in thirty different ways. Most are small pickups with another in tow behind. Chevy Luv being the preferred truck. I see that all the hitches are of personal manufacture. These also are heaped fore and aft with the unknown, a few bicycles sticking out in places, some with used washing machines. I ask if we can join their convoy but no, no, and a subject change. He points out a small truck stuffed with washers, dryers, and the like. He says that the fellow who owns that was coming to meet it on a bus, but the bus was attacked by drug lord bandits. After gun point robbery of the passengers, the *Federales* showed up and a major fusillade began. The bandits using the bus as cover returned much automatic fire, resulting in a high-caliber response from the uniforms. The passengers had to lie on the floor as the windows and walls were blasted to shreds, some taking a few winging rounds, as was the case of the laundry cargo owner. Eventually the bandits made a break for it in their SUV, the machine gun

Leslie Gulch, Idaho

chase rattling off into the night roads of Mexico. He says this happened at 1 in the morning, just across the Rio, a major reason not to travel at night. Somehow, I am convinced.

Around 11, Onhell returns and says he has to have a contact number of a friend in Belize to complete the paperwork. What the hell, Onhell. But this is necessary. I know Chet, the hostel owner, not all that well, but have no idea how to get a hold of him. Luckily, they have wi-fi in the office, so I take my computer in there and search for him on the web. Videos of him, interviews, lots of tourist info, but can't find his number. Finally, getting desperate, I find a blog reviewing his place, some loving it, others calling it dirty. An afterthought in there gives the street location and the phone number of the hostel. Back out to the truck. A few tries with international dialing and country codes and I reach him on the phone. *Wow*. He remembers me kindly and is glad to be my point of contact. He says to call him if there is any trouble in Mexico. Yeah, right. Then launches into a long-winded story as he loves to do at a buck a minute. Eventually he concludes to my polite urgings, and I give the number to Onhell. "OK, wait."

About 12:30 Onhell comes out with the papers, a huge stack some three inches thick. There are four copies of the main document, listing a thousand things in Spanish. I pay the $230 fee, not feeling particularly compensated for the money. "OK, you go now," he says. Umm, any better directions than that? Get some addition vague comments with irritation. Off we go, into . . . what?

We veer off to the right of the toll shack, getting into a massive double line of *transmigrantes*. Wait. Eventually a scary-looking police something comes down the line, looking at our papers disparagingly, grunting and sending us on our way. The line ahead has vanished somewhere. The road splits. We take the right that leads to a fence, from which I have to get the trailer turned around by driving on a questionable lawn. Take the other. We are directed in a loop-de-loop, and into the tool booth. They take money and tell us that the next booth is the inspector's. If we get a green light, we can proceed. If we get a red light, we have to pull over and have the truckload torn apart. We approach the booth in high anxiety. Most are getting the red light. Our turn. A woman yakking and flirting with another booth member. Takes our papers. A snickering consultation with the other flirtee. A sigh and, with indifference, she hits a button. Green light. Oh thank Dog who art in haven. Fifty *transmigrantes* are pulled over waiting to be pulled apart. Through confusing corridors of road cones we come to another booth. I confess we have two bikes and a TV we need to pay tax on. The official, about four feet higher than my window, scribbles something on a yellow sticky which he slaps on our papers. "Where is the tax office?" I ask. A vague arm waving in the only direction available to us. On we go. In a hundred feet we come to a few farmer-looking types with their hands out. Fumigation. We give them money. They give us a sticker. Another fifty feet and stopped again where some crippled-looking guys spray the side of the truck with some light green fluid. One sprays, the other apparently supervises. Only one side is done, and we're waved on.

Waved into a large parking lot where a fast-talking kid, dressed rather shabbily, assaults us. He blasts at us loud and fast, but friendly, with ample arm waving. We only catch a few words, like *immigration*, *casa*, and *permit*. Kim engages him with many smiling "*si*'s." We get out of the truck, locking the panting animals in tightly, and head to the second building. The first in front of us is an imposing concrete cube with a redoubt on top and a very bored mean military guy, sunken down in his sand bags behind a gun the size of a canoe. I have the feeling he really wants to use it. I ask Kim what she thought the parking guy was saying, as she

answered him with such conviction. She says she had no idea. We must skirt around a lower machine nest with another scowling soldier, his gun only as large as a small Christmas tree. Into the second building where there are two or four lines, as it is indistinct. Slowly we inch with other *transmigrantes* toward the cajas (service windows?). When it comes our turn, both Kim and I advance, which is breaking the rules. On inspection, we are already stamped and permitted, so waved vaguely on to the other line. Wait there for fifteen minutes. I finally reach a caja. Showing all the papers it is again determined that I already have everything. Now to pay the tax. There is a tiny office on the corner the size of a Volkswagen bus with 2 irritated officials and some computers. When my time comes I present the pile of paperwork, of which they are only interested in the sticky note. *Pagamento* blah blah *casa*, gestating randomly towards the other building. Go pay there, I gather. They hold my passport and driver's license. Over to the other building. Kim returns to the truck to start the AC so the *animalitos* can breath. The machine gun nest must be passed close; I feel the beady eyes upon me. In the building it is completely bare, a vast dimly lit void with a 25-foot ceiling. A caja is on one side behind thick bullet-proof glass. Presenting him with the scrawls of the tax people, I pay fifteen bucks with a hundred, getting the rest in peso change. Back to the tax box. Have to wait in line again. Hand in my receipt and get my license and passport back, skirt the gun nest, back in the parking lot with Kim. I see a van disgorging white people, about a half dozen. They are very fat and pasty, some professor-looking types, dazed and scared. "Immigration is that building over there," I offer. "Where are you going?" They say they are driving to Costa Rica, but little else. I know that I am a mark for these Mexican land sharks, but they are as good as in the belly. A wave of pity for these sheltered people washes over me, but what can be done? Their fate is sealed. We must move on. The rapid talker is still rambling wildly at Kim, who nods and encourages him as you would a clever dog doing tricks. I give him a 10-peso bill, to his delight, and ask the way out (with hand gestures), though I can see it clearly. He becomes still more exuberant, blocking traffic for us and dancing and waving our way forward. Out of the parking lot, which turns into a shabby two-lane highway. No mention of vet papers or any other animal *documentos* ever came up. We could have brought in elephants. We are elated. In the first mile are a hundred crappy one-story adobe, block, and rusty tin buildings, all proclaiming money exchange. I stop and change out $300 to pesos, a rate of 12.3 to one buck. I have a huge wad of cash, of which I'm very self-conscience and hold concealed. The practice is to watch these transactions from afar, then mug you down the road. Buy some fluids for Kim and I, climb out of the mud ruts and onto the broken highway. We did it! We are into Mexico at last. On our way to paradise.

To be continued in Cenacle | *79* | *October 2011*

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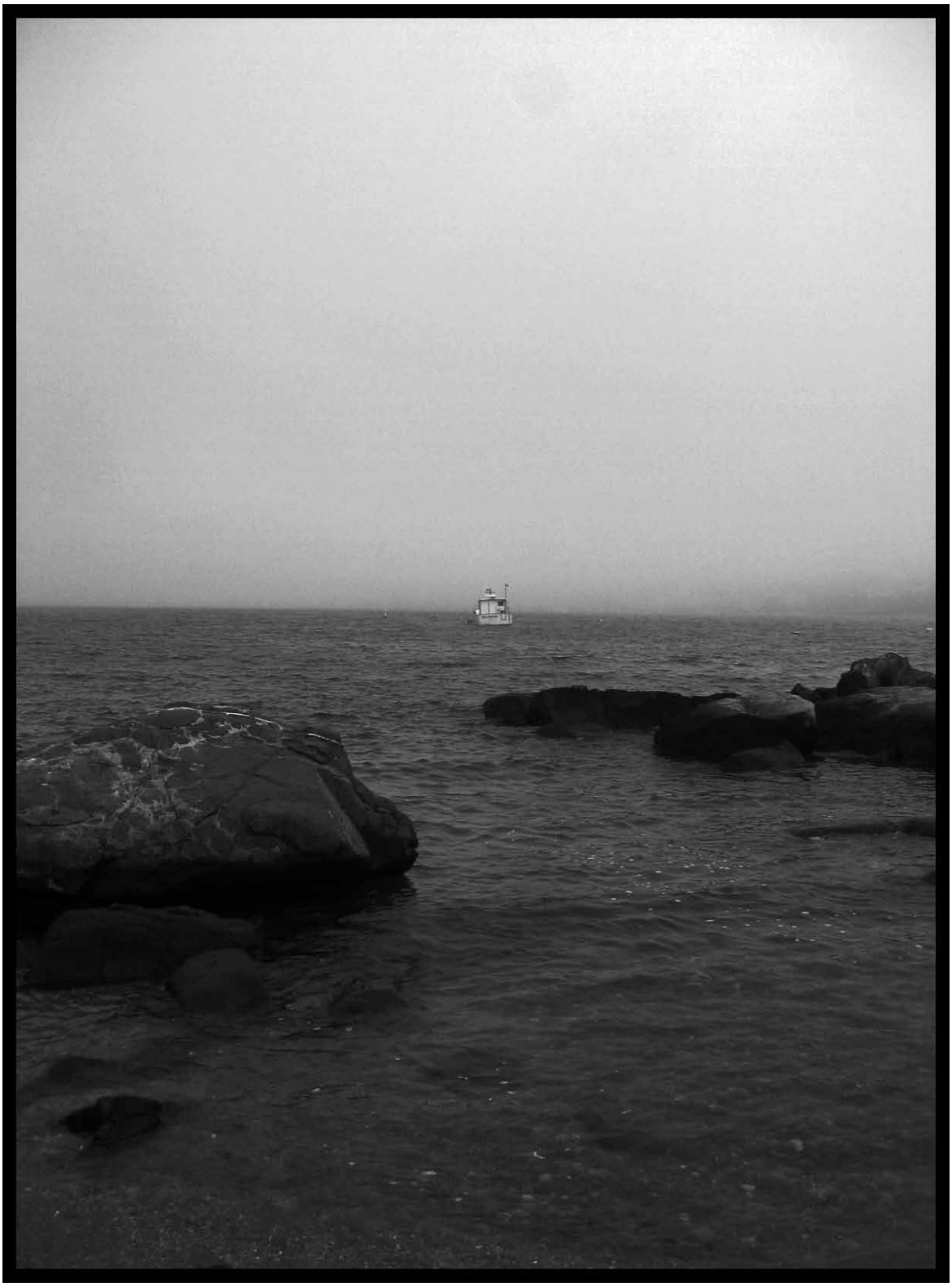

Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Many Musics

Seventh Series

"There's no final answer."
—Dr. Timothy Leary,
Radio interview, 1986.

xvi. Ikebana
[Dale Chihuly, Ikebana Boat, Wooden & Glass, 2011]

The old rowboat collects everything
as it rides through the dead world,
collects what crawls from the black water,
what falls from vines overhead,
what is sometimes thrown from shore
by unseen hands, or paws, even fins.

The water is smooth, calm like death,
mirrors the dark sky where nothing shines
by day & nobody looks up to see at night.
You're wondering how I know, from where
I see this boat. He told me about it,
my brother, who won't sleep to see it better.

The back room is his whole quiet world,
where he shuns food, bed, radio, TV,
to see it better, to use his every sense to see,
use his tingling saggy skin, lays on the floor
in a cluster of pained limbs, fights through visions,
streets of skulls, shoreless ponds, children too.

I don't know if he knows me when I come,
shut the crooked door, kneel close to him,
see & smell & taste his sickness, sample his
current hour's picture, decide to stay or no—

He talks of the burnt umber tentacle,
 reaching back, the dragging pink wing
feathering the water, the seagull's heart
 a decaying stone in the chipped blue shell.
"Sometimes the boat is moving slower,"
 he croons, & I almost touch him, refrain,
remember another time. It was bad.

Walking back into the shop where the patrons
 beg for books of easy treatises on God
& cartoons of lovers from their hearts'
 forbidden chambers, I stop. I stop.
I wonder again if this is my brother's
 boat, if his onion-shaped bullets, &
wooden bells leaking fuel oil aren't this world
 a level or two below, moving even slower.

******

xvii. Way of the Creatures

I follow the Way of the Creatures
which is no way but to sing & sing
which is no way but to love & pity more
which is no way but to know a little
    in the big mirror
which is no way but to watch & wait,
     & so much unknown but there's light
    & there's breeze, & maybe someone nearby warm
which is no way but to see the stars
    & decide will I go with them high or
    will they see me here down low?
which is no way but a pinknosed white bunny
    flashing past, a cackling imp crying
    more play, a sleek panda bear dancing
    by, the urge to include all, & especially you.

******

xviii. Let Go

So let's say there are three friends,
 nice guys, & here's the twist:
one is gay, & another hates gays.
 Hm. How's that going to work.

I had a dream one night that the
 gay-hater took a long knife to
his friend & cut out his heart.

He showed me & I smiled at him.
 The moon was just a slice as we
buried our friend. As we sang glorious songs
 about suffering & buried our dear friend.

******

xix. White Tuxedo & Black Top Hat

The dice rolls six & I look out
 the long window. My father laughs,
knowing things I do not. Better answers,
 no answers, I can't say. I turn back
to him, to the others, to the gas pump
 I can't figure to operate. My father
nods & we each take turns. This apartment
 will need everyone's help to make a good go.

Sophia, I love her name most of all,
 she calls it a cat's name & says no more,
smiling. She picked out the furniture,
 all of it, blonde woods, old, needing
work, hands on, love. She found curtains
 in thrift shops & sewed them back together.

Eventually, I have to go. Parties like these
 come to their dreaming end with
the dawn, that chilly morning breeze.
 I look at my father, give me something before
I go. Go on, fucker. *Give it me*. Now he's
 not smiling. "Stop singing from your knees."

I nod. Because what else would a dream
 worth recalling have to say?

******

xx. Glaring Lights

My bike in pieces on a long table,
 laid out in plain intimate detail.
One of those single bulbs lighting up the garage,
 & so quiet. What's funny is what moves
a heart, in moments, through the years,
 how it receives & releases & changes shape
again & again. Now I'll tell you that my
 my music took the form of tools & sweat
until we were riding again, what keeps the years
 & close by is a tangle. I've let enough go.

******

xxi. Idée Fixe

The sweet, strange lights at street corners,
 tonight, the luring shadow past each
face, the thought of maybe, new thought,
 or old thought in new dress, yes,
maybe a chance to steer for shore
 again, a moon cracking open mind's flat skies.

******

xxii. Another Way

We stood, my brother & me, regarding
 the pattern on the wall, the labyrinth
fading, right to left, how to travel
 that one? I noticed his fingers tapping the tune,
the one in my mind too, & a few steps
 more to daylight, if not answers, numberless
paths, if not a way, & the next day's chance.
 We nodded, went, maybe the fading labyrinth
our clue that letting go the map is hard, best chance.

******

xxiii. Wider Foam

Nod, burn the canvas, there's new music
 in that smoke. Or let it stay,
mix in some more blood, let curious hungers sniff.

******

xxiv. Winter Island

The preacher stood outside among
his stars, arms held out to his god's
lights, open, open, waiting, smiling, waiting.
And nothing. Minutes, the hours passed.
He returned inside, his immaculate rooms,
his plain, narrow bed. Closed the drapes.

Walked the rooms, wordless, still listening,
still out there among those lights,
so close, waiting. In his study, its walls
ceiling to floor in books, there in the corner,
three small dead rats. And, look, out the door
races a cockroach, shiny shell, see it go.

Walked outside again, now shedding clothes,
mile by mile, to the far end of the island,
the lighthouse, the rocks below, evening seas
thick with fog, arms out again, far out.
No why. No why & there never was. How beautiful.
His god had not descended, neither taken him
away, explained nothing, remained. *Oh my.*

******

xxv. To brother afar

Some eat others, because they can,
because they will, because for a
blinding instant the suffering you
are causing now is newly electrifying
the wire to the suffering caused you then
& worlds & time smash happily,
& let go, breathe out, let the common blood settle.

******

xxvi. Decision Tree

Extracting the poison from its mash,
converting it to the honied drink
we'd dreamed, smiling & mindless its tasters
& soon the end of this world.
We'd go into classrooms, meet families
in their homes, it would take awhile.

Yes, they found me though my love
remains free. They'll burn me &
bury me miles in the earth tonight,
as though flames & shovels may undo.
My love knows better, watching those
who drink the honey, smiling & mindless
they leave this world, melt clean through,
the hardest human idea a clod in the stream.

My love knows you will drink this honey
& let it go at last, whatever it is,
& as you do, & as it goes, your senses
will new wild to the sunshine, sounds
of water on metal, the smells of those
blooms as you go, & the happy, happy dust.

******

xxvii. Bursts of Darkness

Another dream of forests, & worlds of text,
 the orgasmic light of every creation,
& the old, old things still soiling my corners.

I've never believed in redemption as a way
 to efface the hard past. I say:
wear the tatters of your years, where
 they stray to mere threads, where
ugly, where they hurt, & you hurt,
 & everyone hurts. *Wear them.*

Maybe beyond the end there will be
 forests & worlds of text, & redemption
of some plain or ironic kind, but,
 not knowing, what you have is
what you are, & the sum of it all
 might be no god's to account but
your own, how you best wore the worst of it.

******

xxviii. Blood Canvases

An old, small figure hurries through
 streetlamps & hard pour, bent spine
like the question bodies form young
 & minds keep asking until old.
Keeping along with this figure, step
 into a lit shop & the jingling jostle
of others, the question on the shelves
 of goods, answers on the labels,
among the pages, answers in long rows
 of auditioning come-hither carnies,
& which to choose, which to choose?
 Or select a few & mix up a stew?

Back in the rain, no less hard,
 hurry, the figure is diminishing
with a sack & the strong wish to be alone.
 Into the building, the many steps,
the tilted door of home. Ahh, sounds
 of deadbolt & latch. Now open the sack,
take out the answer, only one was taken,
 & lay aside the question, chipped
from spine, just to see, just to see.
 Consider, yes, yes. Turn off the lights,
try candles. Some music, there, that
 old song of skeletons in moonlight. There. Yes. Will do.

******

xxix. Kindness Most Binds

I learned a lot that summer, living
 in the drainage ditch by the sidewalk.
At first people just stared at me,
 unable to parse out my angle or shill.
Eventually they made picnics nearby,
 not too near, but enough to call me a neighbor.

The mayor appeared, a man in a waxen
 suit & linen moustache. Several bigger men
flanked him, looking for my bigger men,
 studied the security details of my ditch,
frowned. The mayor, I think it was him,
 I'd like to think it was him, smiled,
urged an alliance. Gestured around where
 we lay together. All these picnickers . . .

By summer's end, even the older dogs &
 butterflies were going or gone. I felt ready
to stand up, move along, it had been
 a good run. The brown grass beneath me
would green again, it always does.
 The molded form of my body would remain,
oh awhile, & then it too would go where
 everything goes when gone, but not forgotten.

******

xxx. Seeding

"It's just a ride."
—Bill Hicks, 1993

What if you realize, one day, that
everything is alive? Not one, as
many the guru would say, still many,
but alive? All alive, the easy of this
watching your love stirring the dawn,
walking the pathless trees of an
unnamed wood. The hard of this,
when looking at the worn out things
of men, lost of shine & purpose, gummed
& greasy, broken last hour or longer.

Mapless, following this thought, you make
along as before, step high enough among
the daily prejudice & bored laughter, but
now uneasy with your own movements.
Do these live things know & accept their
ends? The jar of vegetable paste, even
the half-crushed moth on the sidewalk.
Is the first glad its contents now
spent out, does tossing the other
from sidewalk to bush reck its passage?

The questions are ridiculous, remain,
widen to include paper clips & tree branches
part-severed by the night's thunderstorm. Where
does thought & feeling end, how to know,
are the usual borders even most useful?
This electing of men, getting of coin, washing
every new soul in a half-reverence of
the world, yet still the numbers measure decay
by the years, still the promise rusts pretty by.

Some say dispose things better, some burn
it all, some include us too. This world
little worth a sober god's remaining glance,
or cleansing stroke. Such a loathing
that the dead are boxed well & imagined
free to sing unsheathed of mouth & bones.
Some say there are answers to this world,
every fallen icon & twisted bone in the red dust,
but later, love, later along the tale.

But say: Everything is alive, made to find
its function & receive its due? Aren't
the massing murderous ways of men
enough? Why worry the dark light bulbs
& steers to the knife? The fate of snowflakes
& old wrecks in deserts & rivers?
Do some empathies lead nowhere but
lonesome dream corners of the fancy?

I have surely wondered all this,
as you do tonight. Felt the chasm
among each & all wide & bricked as
though by stone. I've wondered too:
why feel but only so far, why
imagine but with an eye on the clock,
an ear for the door? Tonight, perhaps,
we ask this question over a distance
wider than the world. Wonder, hopeless,
yet still, does paradise not steam
from the shit as the sonnet, the burning,
the breathless, as every new psalm of smoke?

* * * * * *

Excerpts from

Walden; or, Life in the Woods

[Classic Essay]

Published by Ticknor and Fields, Boston, 1854.

When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned my living by the labor of my hands only. I lived there two years and two months. At present I am a sojourner in civilized life again.

I should not obtrude my affairs so much on the notice of my readers if very particular inquiries had not been made by my townsmen concerning my mode of life, which some would call impertinent, though they do not appear to me at all impertinent, but, considering the circumstances, very natural and pertinent. Some have asked what I got to eat; if I did not feel lonesome; if I was not afraid; and the like. Others have been curious to learn what portion of my income I devoted to charitable purposes; and some, who have large families, how many poor children I maintained. I will therefore ask those of my readers who feel no particular interest in me to pardon me if I undertake to answer some of these questions in this book. In most books, the I, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience. Moreover, I, on my side, require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not merely what he has heard of other men's lives; some such account as he would send to his kindred from a distant land; for if he has lived sincerely, it must have been in a distant land to me. Perhaps these pages are more particularly addressed to poor students. As for the rest of my readers, they will accept such portions as apply to them. I trust that none will stretch the seams in putting on the coat, for it may do good service to him whom it fits.

I would fain say something, not so much concerning the Chinese and Sandwich Islanders as you who read these pages, who are said to live in New England; something about your condition, especially your outward condition or circumstances in this world, in this town, what it is, whether it is necessary that it be as bad as it is, whether it cannot be improved as well as not. I have travelled a good deal in Concord; and everywhere, in shops, and offices, and fields, the inhabitants have appeared to me to be doing penance in a thousand remarkable ways. What I have heard of Bramins sitting exposed to four fires and looking in the face of the sun; or hanging suspended, with their heads downward, over flames; or looking at the heavens over their shoulders "until it becomes impossible for them to resume their natural position, while from the twist of the neck nothing but liquids can pass into the stomach"; or dwelling, chained for life, at the foot of a tree; or measuring with their bodies, like caterpillars, the breadth of vast empires; or standing on one leg on the tops of pillars—even these forms of conscious penance are hardly more incredible and astonishing than the scenes which I daily witness. The twelve labors of Hercules were trifling in comparison with those which my neighbors have undertaken; for they were only twelve, and had an end; but I could never see that these men slew or captured any monster or finished any labor. They have no friend Iolaus to burn with a hot iron the root of the hydra's

head, but as soon as one head is crushed, two spring up.

I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. Better if they had been born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf, that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field they were called to labor in. Who made them serfs of the soil? Why should they eat their sixty acres, when man is condemned to eat only his peck of dirt? Why should they begin digging their graves as soon as they are born? They have got to live a man's life, pushing all these things before them, and get on as well as they can. How many a poor immortal soul have I met well-nigh crushed and smothered under its load, creeping down the road of life, pushing before it a barn seventy-five feet by forty, its Augean stables never cleansed, and one hundred acres of land, tillage, mowing, pasture, and woodlot! The portionless, who struggle with no such unnecessary inherited encumbrances, find it labor enough to subdue and cultivate a few cubic feet of flesh.

But men labor under a mistake. The better part of the man is soon plowed into the soil for compost. By a seeming fate, commonly called necessity, they are employed, as it says in an old book, laying up treasures which moth and rust will corrupt and thieves break through and steal. It is a fool's life, as they will find when they get to the end of it, if not before. It is said that Deucalion and Pyrrha created men by throwing stones over their heads behind them:

> *Inde genus durum sumus, experiensque laborum,*
> *Et documenta damus qua simus origine nati.*[1]

Or, as Raleigh rhymes it in his sonorous way,

> From thence our kind hard-hearted is, enduring pain and care;
> Approving that our bodies of a stony nature are.[2]

So much for a blind obedience to a blundering oracle, throwing the stones over their heads behind them, and not seeing where they fell.

Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much for that. Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market. He has no time to be anything but a machine. How can he remember well his ignorance—which his growth requires—who has so often to use his knowledge? We should feed and clothe him gratuitously sometimes, and recruit him with our cordials, before we judge of him. The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we do not treat ourselves nor one another thus tenderly.

Some of you, we all know, are poor, find it hard to live, are sometimes, as it were, gasping for breath. I have no doubt that some of you who read this book are unable to pay for all the dinners which you have actually eaten, or for the coats and shoes which are fast wearing or are already worn out, and have come to this page to spend borrowed or stolen time, robbing your creditors of an hour. It is very evident what mean and sneaking lives many of you live, for my sight has been whetted by experience; always on the limits, trying to get into business and trying to get out of debt, a very ancient slough, called by the Latins *aes alienum*, another's brass, for some of their coins were made of brass; still living, and dying, and buried by this other's brass; always promising to pay, promising to pay, tomorrow, and dying today, insolvent; seeking to curry favor, to get custom, by how many modes, only not state-prison

[1] From Ovid, translates as: "Thence we are a hardened and laborious race / Proving full well our stony origin."

[2] Translation of Ovid in Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World*, 1614.

offenses; lying, flattering, voting, contracting yourselves into a nutshell of civility or dilating into an atmosphere of thin and vaporous generosity, that you may persuade your neighbor to let you make his shoes, or his hat, or his coat, or his carriage, or import his groceries for him; making yourselves sick, that you may lay up something against a sick day, something to be tucked away in an old chest, or in a stocking behind the plastering, or, more safely, in the brick bank; no matter where, no matter how much or how little.

I sometimes wonder that we can be so frivolous, I may almost say, as to attend to the gross but somewhat foreign form of servitude called Negro Slavery, there are so many keen and subtle masters that enslave both North and South. It is hard to have a Southern overseer; it is worse to have a Northern one; but worst of all when you are the slave-driver of yourself. Talk of a divinity in man! Look at the teamster on the highway, wending to market by day or night; does any divinity stir within him? His highest duty to fodder and water his horses! What is his destiny to him compared with the shipping interests? Does not he drive for Squire Make-a-stir? How godlike, how immortal, is he? See how he cowers and sneaks, how vaguely all the day he fears, not being immortal nor divine, but the slave and prisoner of his own opinion of himself, a fame won by his own deeds. Public opinion is a weak tyrant compared with our own private opinion. What a man thinks of himself, that it is which determines, or rather indicates, his fate. Self-emancipation even in the West Indian provinces of the fancy and imagination—what Wilberforce is there to bring that about? Think, also, of the ladies of the land weaving toilet cushions against the last day, not to betray too green an interest in their fates! As if you could kill time without injuring eternity.

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.

When we consider what, to use the words of the catechism, is the chief end of man, and what are the true necessaries and means of life, it appears as if men had deliberately chosen the common mode of living because they preferred it to any other. Yet they honestly think there is no choice left. But alert and healthy natures remember that the sun rose clear. It is never too late to give up our prejudices. No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof. What everybody echoes or in silence passes by as true to-day may turn out to be falsehood to-morrow, mere smoke of opinion, which some had trusted for a cloud that would sprinkle fertilizing rain on their fields. What old people say you cannot do, you try and find that you can. Old deeds for old people, and new deeds for new. Old people did not know enough once, perchance, to fetch fresh fuel to keep the fire a-going; new people put a little dry wood under a pot, and are whirled round the globe with the speed of birds, in a way to kill old people, as the phrase is. Age is no better, hardly so well, qualified for an instructor as youth, for it has not profited so much as it has lost. One may almost doubt if the wisest man has learned anything of absolute value by living. Practically, the old have no very important advice to give the young, their own experience has been so partial, and their lives have been such miserable failures, for private reasons, as they must believe; and it may be that they have some faith left which belies that experience, and they are only less young than they were. I have lived some thirty years on this planet, and I have yet to hear the first syllable of valuable or even earnest advice from my seniors. They have told me nothing, and probably cannot tell me anything to the purpose. Here is life, an experiment to a great extent untried by me; but it does not avail me that they have tried it. If I have any experience which I think valuable, I am sure to reflect that this my Mentors said nothing about.

One farmer says to me, "You cannot live on vegetable food solely, for it furnishes nothing to make bones with"; and so he religiously devotes a part of his day to supplying his system with the raw material of bones; walking all the while he talks behind his oxen, which, with vegetable-made bones, jerk him and his lumbering plow along in spite of every obstacle. Some things are really necessaries of

life in some circles, the most helpless and diseased, which in others are luxuries merely, and in others still are entirely unknown.

The whole ground of human life seems to some to have been gone over by their predecessors, both the heights and the valleys, and all things to have been cared for. According to Evelyn, "the wise Solomon prescribed ordinances for the very distances of trees; and the Roman praetors have decided how often you may go into your neighbor's land to gather the acorns which fall on it without trespass, and what share belongs to that neighbor." Hippocrates has even left directions how we should cut our nails; that is, even with the ends of the fingers, neither shorter nor longer. Undoubtedly the very tedium and ennui which presume to have exhausted the variety and the joys of life are as old as Adam. But man's capacities have never been measured; nor are we to judge of what he can do by any precedents, so little has been tried. Whatever have been thy failures hitherto, "be not afflicted, my child, for who shall assign to thee what thou hast left undone?"

We might try our lives by a thousand simple tests; as, for instance, that the same sun which ripens my beans illumines at once a system of earths like ours. If I had remembered this it would have prevented some mistakes. This was not the light in which I hoed them. The stars are the apexes of what wonderful triangles! What distant and different beings in the various mansions of the universe are contemplating the same one at the same moment! Nature and human life are as various as our several constitutions. Who shall say what prospect life offers to another? Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant? We should live in all the ages of the world in an hour; ay, in all the worlds of the ages. History, Poetry, Mythology!—I know of no reading of another's experience so startling and informing as this would be.

The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well? You may say the wisest thing you can, old man—you who have lived seventy years, not without honor of a kind—I hear an irresistible voice which invites me away from all that. One generation abandons the enterprises of another like stranded vessels.

I think that we may safely trust a good deal more than we do. We may waive just so much care of ourselves as we honestly bestow elsewhere. Nature is as well adapted to our weakness as to our strength. The incessant anxiety and strain of some is a well-nigh incurable form of disease. We are made to exaggerate the importance of what work we do; and yet how much is not done by us! or, what if we had been taken sick? How vigilant we are! determined not to live by faith if we can avoid it; all the day long on the alert, at night we unwillingly say our prayers and commit ourselves to uncertainties. So thoroughly and sincerely are we compelled to live, reverencing our life, and denying the possibility of change. This is the only way, we say; but there are as many ways as there can be drawn radii from one centre. All change is a miracle to contemplate; but it is a miracle which is taking place every instant. Confucius said, "To know that we know what we know, and that we do not know what we do not know, that is true knowledge." When one man has reduced a fact of the imagination to be a fact to his understanding, I foresee that all men at length establish their lives on that basis.

Let us consider for a moment what most of the trouble and anxiety which I have referred to is about, and how much it is necessary that we be troubled, or at least careful. It would be some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward civilization, if only to learn what are the gross necessaries of life and what methods have been taken to obtain them; or even to look over the old day-books of the merchants, to see what it was that men most commonly bought at the stores, what they stored, that is, what are the grossest groceries. For the improvements of ages have had but little influence on the essential laws of man's existence; as our skeletons, probably, are not to be distinguished from those of our ancestors.

By the words, necessary of life, I mean whatever, of all that man obtains by his own exertions, has been from the first, or from long use has become, so important to human life that few, if any, whether from savageness, or poverty, or philosophy, ever attempt to do without it. To many creatures

there is in this sense but one necessary of life, Food. To the bison of the prairie it is a few inches of palatable grass, with water to drink; unless he seeks the Shelter of the forest or the mountain's shadow. None of the brute creation requires more than Food and Shelter. The necessaries of life for man in this climate may, accurately enough, be distributed under the several heads of Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Fuel; for not till we have secured these are we prepared to entertain the true problems of life with freedom and a prospect of success. Man has invented, not only houses, but clothes and cooked food; and possibly from the accidental discovery of the warmth of fire, and the consequent use of it, at first a luxury, arose the present necessity to sit by it. We observe cats and dogs acquiring the same second nature. By proper Shelter and Clothing we legitimately retain our own internal heat; but with an excess of these, or of Fuel, that is, with an external heat greater than our own internal, may not cookery properly be said to begin? Darwin, the naturalist, says of the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego, that while his own party, who were well clothed and sitting close to a fire, were far from too warm, these naked savages, who were farther off, were observed, to his great surprise, "to be streaming with perspiration at undergoing such a roasting." So, we are told, the New Hollander goes naked with impunity, while the European shivers in his clothes. Is it impossible to combine the hardiness of these savages with the intellectualness of the civilized man? According to Liebig, man's body is a stove, and food the fuel which keeps up the internal combustion in the lungs. In cold weather we eat more, in warm less. The animal heat is the result of a slow combustion, and disease and death take place when this is too rapid; or for want of fuel, or from some defect in the draught, the fire goes out. Of course the vital heat is not to be confounded with fire; but so much for analogy. It appears, therefore, from the above list, that the expression, animal life, is nearly synonymous with the expression, animal heat; for while Food may be regarded as the Fuel which keeps up the fire within us—and Fuel serves only to prepare that Food or to increase the warmth of our bodies by addition from without—Shelter and Clothing also serve only to retain the heat thus generated and absorbed.

The grand necessity, then, for our bodies, is to keep warm, to keep the vital heat in us. What pains we accordingly take, not only with our Food, and Clothing, and Shelter, but with our beds, which are our night-clothes, robbing the nests and breasts of birds to prepare this shelter within a shelter, as the mole has its bed of grass and leaves at the end of its burrow! The poor man is wont to complain that this is a cold world; and to cold, no less physical than social, we refer directly a great part of our ails. The summer, in some climates, makes possible to man a sort of Elysian life. Fuel, except to cook his Food, is then unnecessary; the sun is his fire, and many of the fruits are sufficiently cooked by its rays; while Food generally is more various, and more easily obtained, and Clothing and Shelter are wholly or half unnecessary. At the present day, and in this country, as I find by my own experience, a few implements, a knife, an axe, a spade, a wheelbarrow, etc., and for the studious, lamplight, stationery, and access to a few books, rank next to necessaries, and can all be obtained at a trifling cost. Yet some, not wise, go to the other side of the globe, to barbarous and unhealthy regions, and devote themselves to trade for ten or twenty years, in order that they may live—that is, keep comfortably warm—and die in New England at last. The luxuriously rich are not simply kept comfortably warm, but unnaturally hot; as I implied before, they are cooked, of course a la mode.

Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind. With respect to luxuries and comforts, the wisest have ever lived a more simple and meagre life than the poor. The ancient philosophers, Chinese, Hindoo, Persian, and Greek, were a class than which none has been poorer in outward riches, none so rich in inward. We know not much about them. It is remarkable that we know so much of them as we do. The same is true of the more modern reformers and benefactors of their race. None can be an impartial or wise observer of human life but from the vantage ground of what we should call voluntary poverty. Of a life of luxury the fruit is luxury, whether in agriculture, or commerce, or literature, or art. There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers. Yet it is admirable to profess because it was once admirable to live. To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found

a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically. The success of great scholars and thinkers is commonly a courtier-like success, not kingly, not manly. They make shift to live merely by conformity, practically as their fathers did, and are in no sense the progenitors of a noble race of men. But why do men degenerate ever? What makes families run out? What is the nature of the luxury which enervates and destroys nations? Are we sure that there is none of it in our own lives? The philosopher is in advance of his age even in the outward form of his life. He is not fed, sheltered, clothed, warmed, like his contemporaries. How can a man be a philosopher and not maintain his vital heat by better methods than other men?

When a man is warmed by the several modes which I have described, what does he want next? Surely not more warmth of the same kind, as more and richer food, larger and more splendid houses, finer and more abundant clothing, more numerous, incessant, and hotter fires, and the like. When he has obtained those things which are necessary to life, there is another alternative than to obtain the superfluities; and that is, to adventure on life now, his vacation from humbler toil having commenced. The soil, it appears, is suited to the seed, for it has sent its radicle downward, and it may now send its shoot upward also with confidence. Why has man rooted himself thus firmly in the earth, but that he may rise in the same proportion into the heavens above?—for the nobler plants are valued for the fruit they bear at last in the air and light, far from the ground, and are not treated like the humbler esculents, which, though they may be biennials, are cultivated only till they have perfected their root, and often cut down at top for this purpose, so that most would not know them in their flowering season.

I do not mean to prescribe rules to strong and valiant natures, who will mind their own affairs whether in heaven or hell, and perchance build more magnificently and spend more lavishly than the richest, without ever impoverishing themselves, not knowing how they live—if, indeed, there are any such, as has been dreamed; nor to those who find their encouragement and inspiration in precisely the present condition of things, and cherish it with the fondness and enthusiasm of lovers—and, to some extent, I reckon myself in this number; I do not speak to those who are well employed, in whatever circumstances, and they know whether they are well employed or not;—but mainly to the mass of men who are discontented, and idly complaining of the hardness of their lot or of the times, when they might improve them. There are some who complain most energetically and inconsolably of any, because they are, as they say, doing their duty. I also have in my mind that seemingly wealthy, but most terribly impoverished class of all, who have accumulated dross, but know not how to use it, or get rid of it, and thus have forged their own golden or silver fetters.

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This is a delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore. I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself. As I walk along the stony shore of the pond in my shirt-sleeves, though it is cool as well as cloudy and windy, and I see nothing special to attract me, all the elements are unusually congenial to me. The bullfrogs trump to usher in the night, and the note of the whip-poor-will is borne on the rippling wind from over the water. Sympathy with the fluttering alder and poplar leaves almost takes away my breath; yet, like the lake, my serenity is rippled but not ruffled. These small waves raised by the evening wind are as remote from storm as the smooth reflecting surface. Though it is now dark, the wind still blows and roars in the wood, the waves still dash, and some creatures lull the rest with their notes. The repose is never complete. The wildest animals do not repose, but seek their prey now; the fox, and skunk, and rabbit, now roam the fields and woods without fear. They are Nature's watchmen—links which connect the days of animated life.

When I return to my house I find that visitors have been there and left their cards, either a bunch of flowers, or a wreath of evergreen, or a name in pencil on a yellow walnut leaf or a chip. They who come rarely to the woods take some little piece of the forest into their hands to play with by the

way, which they leave, either intentionally or accidentally. One has peeled a willow wand, woven it into a ring, and dropped it on my table. I could always tell if visitors had called in my absence, either by the bended twigs or grass, or the print of their shoes, and generally of what sex or age or quality they were by some slight trace left, as a flower dropped, or a bunch of grass plucked and thrown away, even as far off as the railroad, half a mile distant, or by the lingering odor of a cigar or pipe. Nay, I was frequently notified of the passage of a traveller along the highway sixty rods off by the scent of his pipe.

There is commonly sufficient space about us. Our horizon is never quite at our elbows. The thick wood is not just at our door, nor the pond, but somewhat is always clearing, familiar and worn by us, appropriated and fenced in some way, and reclaimed from Nature. For what reason have I this vast range and circuit, some square miles of unfrequented forest, for my privacy, abandoned to me by men? My nearest neighbor is a mile distant, and no house is visible from any place but the hill-tops within half a mile of my own. I have my horizon bounded by woods all to myself; a distant view of the railroad where it touches the pond on the one hand, and of the fence which skirts the woodland road on the other. But for the most part it is as solitary where I live as on the prairies. It is as much Asia or Africa as New England. I have, as it were, my own sun and moon and stars, and a little world all to myself. At night there was never a traveller passed my house, or knocked at my door, more than if I were the first or last man; unless it were in the spring, when at long intervals some came from the village to fish for pouts—they plainly fished much more in the Walden Pond of their own natures, and baited their hooks with darkness—but they soon retreated, usually with light baskets, and left "the world to darkness and to me," and the black kernel of the night was never profaned by any human neighborhood. I believe that men are generally still a little afraid of the dark, though the witches are all hung, and Christianity and candles have been introduced.

Yet I experienced sometimes that the most sweet and tender, the most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any natural object, even for the poor misanthrope and most melancholy man. There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still. There was never yet such a storm but it was Æolian music to a healthy and innocent ear. Nothing can rightly compel a simple and brave man to a vulgar sadness. While I enjoy the friendship of the seasons I trust that nothing can make life a burden to me. The gentle rain which waters my beans and keeps me in the house today is not drear and melancholy, but good for me too. Though it prevents my hoeing them, it is of far more worth than my hoeing. If it should continue so long as to cause the seeds to rot in the ground and destroy the potatoes in the low lands, it would still be good for the grass on the uplands, and, being good for the grass, it would be good for me. Sometimes, when I compare myself with other men, it seems as if I were more favored by the gods than they, beyond any deserts that I am conscious of; as if I had a warrant and surety at their hands which my fellows have not, and were especially guided and guarded. I do not flatter myself, but if it be possible they flatter me. I have never felt lonesome, or in the least oppressed by a sense of solitude, but once, and that was a few weeks after I came to the woods, when, for an hour, I doubted if the near neighborhood of man was not essential to a serene and healthy life. To be alone was something unpleasant. But I was at the same time conscious of a slight insanity in my mood, and seemed to foresee my recovery. In the midst of a gentle rain while these thoughts prevailed, I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again.

"Mourning untimely consumes the sad;
Few are their days in the land of the living,
Beautiful daughter of Toscar."[3]

Some of my pleasantest hours were during the long rain-storms in the spring or fall, which confined me to the house for the afternoon as well as the forenoon, soothed by their ceaseless roar and pelting; when an early twilight ushered in a long evening in which many thoughts had time to take root and unfold themselves. In those driving northeast rains which tried the village houses so, when the maids stood ready with mop and pail in front entries to keep the deluge out, I sat behind my door in my little house, which was all entry, and thoroughly enjoyed its protection. In one heavy thunder-shower the lightning struck a large pitch pine across the pond, making a very conspicuous and perfectly regular spiral groove from top to bottom, an inch or more deep, and four or five inches wide, as you would groove a walking-stick. I passed it again the other day, and was struck with awe on looking up and beholding that mark, now more distinct than ever, where a terrific and resistless bolt came down out of the harmless sky eight years ago. Men frequently say to me, "I should think you would feel lonesome down there, and want to be nearer to folks, rainy and snowy days and nights especially." I am tempted to reply to such—This whole earth which we inhabit is but a point in space. How far apart, think you, dwell the two most distant inhabitants of yonder star, the breadth of whose disk cannot be appreciated by our instruments? Why should I feel lonely? is not our planet in the Milky Way? This which you put seems to me not to be the most important question. What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary? I have found that no exertion of the legs can bring two minds much nearer to one another. What do we want most to dwell near to? Not to many men surely, the depot, the post-office, the bar-room, the meeting-house, the school-house, the grocery, Beacon Hill, or the Five Points, where men most congregate, but to the perennial source of our life, whence in all our experience we have found that to issue, as the willow stands near the water and sends out its roots in that direction. This will vary with different natures, but this is the place where a wise man will dig his cellar . . . . I one evening overtook one of my townsmen, who has accumulated what is called "a handsome property"—though I never got a *fair* view of it—on the Walden road, driving a pair of cattle to market, who inquired of me how I could bring my mind to give up so many of the comforts of life. I answered that I was very sure I liked it passably well; I was not joking. And so I went home to my bed, and left him to pick his way through the darkness and the mud to Brighton—or Bright-town—which place he would reach some time in the morning.

Any prospect of awakening or coming to life to a dead man makes indifferent all times and places. The place where that may occur is always the same, and indescribably pleasant to all our senses. For the most part we allow only outlying and transient circumstances to make our occasions. They are, in fact, the cause of our distraction. Nearest to all things is that power which fashions their being. *Next* to us the grandest laws are continually being executed. *Next* to us is not the workman whom we have hired, with whom we love so well to talk, but the workman whose work we are.

"How vast and profound is the influence of the subtile powers of Heaven and of Earth!"

"We seek to perceive them, and we do not see them; we seek to hear them, and we do not hear them; identified with the substance of things, they cannot be separated from them."

"They cause that in all the universe men purify and sanctify their hearts, and clothe themselves in their holiday garments to offer sacrifices and oblations to their ancestors. It is an ocean of subtile intelligences. They are everywhere, above us, on our left, on our right; they environ us on all sides."

We are the subjects of an experiment which is not a little interesting to me. Can we not do without the society of our gossips a little while under these circumstances—have our own thoughts to cheer us? Confucius says truly, "Virtue does not remain as an abandoned orphan; it must of necessity have neighbors."

[3] James Macpherson, "Croma," *The Poems of Ossian, 1847.*

With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense. By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent. We are not wholly involved in Nature. I may be either the driftwood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it. I *may* be affected by a theatrical exhibition; on the other hand, I *may not* be affected by an actual event which appears to concern me much more. I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it, and that is no more I than it is you. When the play, it may be the tragedy, of life is over, the spectator goes his way. It was a kind of fiction, a work of the imagination only, so far as he was concerned. This doubleness may easily make us poor neighbors and friends sometimes.

I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude. We are for the most part more lonely when we go abroad among men than when we stay in our chambers. A man thinking or working is always alone, let him be where he will. Solitude is not measured by the miles of space that intervene between a man and his fellows. The really diligent student in one of the crowded hives of Cambridge College is as solitary as a dervish in the desert. The farmer can work alone in the field or the woods all day, hoeing or chopping, and not feel lonesome, because he is employed; but when he comes home at night he cannot sit down in a room alone, at the mercy of his thoughts, but must be where he can "see the folks," and recreate, and as he thinks remunerate himself for his day's solitude; and hence he wonders how the student can sit alone in the house all night and most of the day without ennui and "the blues"; but he does not realize that the student, though in the house, is still at work in *his* field, and chopping in *his* woods, as the farmer in his, and in turn seeks the same recreation and society that the latter does, though it may be a more condensed form of it.

Society is commonly too cheap. We meet at very short intervals, not having had time to acquire any new value for each other. We meet at meals three times a day, and give each other a new taste of that old musty cheese that we are. We have had to agree on a certain set of rules, called etiquette and politeness, to make this frequent meeting tolerable and that we need not come to open war. We meet at the post-office, and at the sociable, and about the fireside every night; we live thick and are in each other's way, and stumble over one another, and I think that we thus lose some respect for one another. Certainly less frequency would suffice for all important and hearty communications. Consider the girls in a factory—never alone, hardly in their dreams. It would be better if there were but one inhabitant to a square mile, as where I live. The value of a man is not in his skin, that we should touch him.

I have heard of a man lost in the woods and dying of famine and exhaustion at the foot of a tree, whose loneliness was relieved by the grotesque visions with which, owing to bodily weakness, his diseased imagination surrounded him, and which he believed to be real. So also, owing to bodily and mental health and strength, we may be continually cheered by a like but more normal and natural society, and come to know that we are never alone.

I have a great deal of company in my house; especially in the morning, when nobody calls. Let me suggest a few comparisons, that some one may convey an idea of my situation. I am no more lonely than the loon in the pond that laughs so loud, or than Walden Pond itself. What company has that lonely lake, I pray? And yet it has not the blue devils, but the blue angels in it, in the azure tint of its waters. The sun is alone, except in thick weather, when there sometimes appear to be two, but one is a mock sun. God is alone—but the devil, he is far from being alone; he sees a great deal of company; he is legion. I am no more lonely than a single mullein or dandelion in a pasture, or a bean leaf, or sorrel, or a horse-fly, or a bumblebee. I am no more lonely than the Mill Brook, or a weathercock, or the north star, or the south wind, or an April shower, or a January thaw, or the first spider in a new house.

I have occasional visits in the long winter evenings, when the snow falls fast and the wind howls in the wood, from an old settler and original proprietor, who is reported to have dug Walden Pond, and stoned it, and fringed it with pine woods; who tells me stories of old time and of new eternity; and between us we manage to pass a cheerful evening with social mirth and pleasant views of things, even without apples or cider—a most wise and humorous friend, whom I love much, who keeps himself more secret than ever did Goffe or Whalley; and though he is thought to be dead, none can show where he is buried. An elderly dame, too, dwells in my neighborhood, invisible to most persons, in whose odorous herb garden I love to stroll sometimes, gathering simples and listening to her fables; for she has a genius of unequalled fertility, and her memory runs back farther than mythology, and she can tell me the original of every fable, and on what fact every one is founded, for the incidents occurred when she was young. A ruddy and lusty old dame, who delights in all weathers and seasons, and is likely to outlive all her children yet.

The indescribable innocence and beneficence of Nature—of sun and wind and rain, of summer and winter—such health, such cheer, they afford forever! and such sympathy have they ever with our race, that all Nature would be affected, and the sun's brightness fade, and the winds would sigh humanely, and the clouds rain tears, and the woods shed their leaves and put on mourning in midsummer, if any man should ever for a just cause grieve. Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?

What is the pill which will keep us well, serene, contented? Not my or thy great-grandfather's, but our great-grandmother Nature's universal, vegetable, botanic medicines, by which she has kept herself young always, outlived so many old Parrs in her day, and fed her health with their decaying fatness. For my panacea, instead of one of those quack vials of a mixture dipped from Acheron and the Dead Sea, which come out of those long shallow black-schooner looking wagons which we sometimes see made to carry bottles, let me have a draught of undiluted morning air. Morning air! If men will not drink of this at the fountainhead of the day, why, then, we must even bottle up some and sell it in the shops, for the benefit of those who have lost their subscription ticket to morning time in this world. But remember, it will not keep quite till noonday even in the coolest cellar, but drive out the stopples long ere that and follow westward the steps of Aurora. I am no worshipper of Hygeia, who was the daughter of that old herb-doctor Æsculapius, and who is represented on monuments holding a serpent in one hand, and in the other a cup out of which the serpent sometimes drinks; but rather of Hebe, cup-bearer to Jupiter, who was the daughter of Juno and wild lettuce, and who had the power of restoring gods and men to the vigor of youth. She was probably the only thoroughly sound-conditioned, healthy, and robust young lady that ever walked the globe, and wherever she came it was spring.

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To the sick the doctors wisely recommend change of air and scenery. Thank Heaven, here is not all the world. The buckeye does not grow in New England, and the mockingbird is rarely heard here. The wild goose is more of a cosmopolite than we; he breaks his fast in Canada, takes a luncheon in the Ohio, and plumes himself for the night in a southern bayou. Even the bison, to some extent, keeps pace with the seasons cropping the pastures of the Colorado only till a greener and sweeter grass awaits him by the Yellowstone. Yet we think that if rail fences are pulled down, and stone walls piled up on our farms, bounds are henceforth set to our lives and our fates decided. If you are chosen town clerk, forsooth, you cannot go to Tierra del Fuego this summer: but you may go to the land of infernal fire nevertheless. The universe is wider than our views of it.

Yet we should oftener look over the tafferel of our craft, like curious passengers, and not make the voyage like stupid sailors picking oakum. The other side of the globe is but the home of our correspondent. Our voyaging is only great-circle sailing, and the doctors prescribe for diseases of the skin merely. One hastens to southern Africa to chase the giraffe; but surely that is not the game he

would be after. How long, pray, would a man hunt giraffes if he could? Snipes and woodcocks also may afford rare sport; but I trust it would be nobler game to shoot one's self.—

> "Direct your eye right inward, and you'll find
> A thousand regions in your mind
> Yet undiscovered. Travel them, and be
> Expert in home-cosmography."

What does Africa—what does the West stand for? Is not our own interior white on the chart? black though it may prove, like the coast, when discovered. Is it the source of the Nile, or the Niger, or the Mississippi, or a Northwest Passage around this continent, that we would find? Are these the problems which most concern mankind? Is Franklin the only man who is lost, that his wife should be so earnest to find him? Does Mr. Grinnell know where he himself is? Be rather the Mungo Park, the Lewis and Clark and Frobisher, of your own streams and oceans; explore your own higher latitudes—with shiploads of preserved meats to support you, if they be necessary; and pile the empty cans sky-high for a sign. Were preserved meats invented to preserve meat merely? Nay, be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought. Every man is the lord of a realm beside which the earthly empire of the Czar is but a petty state, a hummock left by the ice. Yet some can be patriotic who have no *self-respect*, and sacrifice the greater to the less. They love the soil which makes their graves, but have no sympathy with the spirit which may still animate their clay. Patriotism is a maggot in their heads. What was the meaning of that South-Sea Exploring Expedition, with all its parade and expense, but an indirect recognition of the fact that there are continents and seas in the moral world to which every man is an isthmus or an inlet, yet unexplored by him, but that it is easier to sail many thousand miles through cold and storm and cannibals, in a government ship, with five hundred men and boys to assist one, than it is to explore the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean of one's being alone.

> "Erret, et extremos alter scrutetur Iberos.
> Plus habet hic vitae, plus habet ille viæ."
> Let them wander and scrutinize the outlandish Australians.
> I have more of God, they more of the road.

It is not worth the while to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar. Yet do this even till you can do better, and you may perhaps find some "Symmes' Hole" by which to get at the inside at last. England and France, Spain and Portugal, Gold Coast and Slave Coast, all front on this private sea; but no bark from them has ventured out of sight of land, though it is without doubt the direct way to India. If you would learn to speak all tongues and conform to the customs of all nations, if you would travel farther than all travellers, be naturalized in all climes, and cause the Sphinx to dash her head against a stone, even obey the precept of the old philosopher, and Explore thyself. Herein are demanded the eye and the nerve. Only the defeated and deserters go to the wars, cowards that run away and enlist. Start now on that farthest western way, which does not pause at the Mississippi or the Pacific, nor conduct toward a wornout China or Japan, but leads on direct, a tangent to this sphere, summer and winter, day and night, sun down, moon down, and at last earth down too.

It is said that Mirabeau took to highway robbery "to ascertain what degree of resolution was necessary in order to place one's self in formal opposition to the most sacred laws of society." He declared that "a soldier who fights in the ranks does not require half so much courage as a footpad"—that "honor and religion have never stood in the way of a well-considered and a firm resolve." This was manly, as the world goes; and yet it was idle, if not desperate. A saner man would have found himself often enough "in formal opposition" to what are deemed "the most sacred laws of society," through

obedience to yet more sacred laws, and so have tested his resolution without going out of his way. It is not for a man to put himself in such an attitude to society, but to maintain himself in whatever attitude he find himself through obedience to the laws of his being, which will never be one of opposition to a just government, if he should chance to meet with such.

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pond-side; and though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct. It is true, I fear, that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity! I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now.

I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.

It is a ridiculous demand which England and America make, that you shall speak so that they can understand you. Neither men nor toadstools grow so. As if that were important, and there were not enough to understand you without them. As if Nature could support but one order of understandings, could not sustain birds as well as quadrupeds, flying as well as creeping things, and *hush* and *whoa*, which Bright can understand, were the best English. As if there were safety in stupidity alone. I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be *extra-vagant* enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced. *Extra vagance!* it depends on how you are yarded. The migrating buffalo, which seeks new pastures in another latitude, is not extravagant like the cow which kicks over the pail, leaps the cowyard fence, and runs after her calf, in milking time. I desire to speak somewhere *without* bounds; like a man in a waking moment, to men in their waking moments; for I am convinced that I cannot exaggerate enough even to lay the foundation of a true expression. Who that has heard a strain of music feared then lest he should speak extravagantly any more forever? In view of the future or possible, we should live quite laxly and undefined in front, our outlines dim and misty on that side; as our shadows reveal an insensible perspiration toward the sun. The volatile truth of our words should continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement. Their truth is instantly *translated*; its literal monument alone remains. The words which express our faith and piety are not definite; yet they are significant and fragrant like frankincense to superior natures.

Why level downward to our dullest perception always, and praise that as common sense? The commonest sense is the sense of men asleep, which they express by snoring. Sometimes we are inclined to class those who are once-and-a-half-witted with the half-witted, because we appreciate only a third part of their wit. Some would find fault with the morning red, if they ever got up early enough. "They pretend," as I hear, "that the verses of Kabir have four different senses; illusion, spirit, intellect, and the exoteric doctrine of the Vedas"; but in this part of the world it is considered a ground for complaint if a man's writings admit of more than one interpretation. While England endeavors to cure the potato-rot, will not any endeavor to cure the brain-rot, which prevails so much more widely and fatally?

I do not suppose that I have attained to obscurity, but I should be proud if no more fatal fault

were found with my pages on this score than was found with the Walden ice. Southern customers objected to its blue color, which is the evidence of its purity, as if it were muddy, and preferred the Cambridge ice, which is white, but tastes of weeds. The purity men love is like the mists which envelop the earth, and not like the azure ether beyond.

Some are dinning in our ears that we Americans, and moderns generally, are intellectual dwarfs compared with the ancients, or even the Elizabethan men. But what is that to the purpose? A living dog is better than a dead lion. Shall a man go and hang himself because he belongs to the race of pygmies, and not be the biggest pygmy that he can? Let every one mind his own business, and endeavor to be what he was made.

Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away. It is not important that he should mature as soon as an apple tree or an oak. Shall he turn his spring into summer? If the condition of things which we were made for is not yet, what were any reality which we can substitute? We will not be shipwrecked on a vain reality. Shall we with pains erect a heaven of blue glass over ourselves, though when it is done we shall be sure to gaze still at the true ethereal heaven far above, as if the former were not?

There was an artist in the city of Kouroo who was disposed to strive after perfection. One day it came into his mind to make a staff. Having considered that in an imperfect work time is an ingredient, but into a perfect work time does not enter, he said to himself, It shall be perfect in all respects, though I should do nothing else in my life. He proceeded instantly to the forest for wood, being resolved that it should not be made of unsuitable material; and as he searched for and rejected stick after stick, his friends gradually deserted him, for they grew old in their works and died, but he grew not older by a moment. His singleness of purpose and resolution, and his elevated piety, endowed him, without his knowledge, with perennial youth. As he made no compromise with Time, Time kept out of his way, and only sighed at a distance because he could not overcome him. Before he had found a stock in all respects suitable the city of Kouroo was a hoary ruin, and he sat on one of its mounds to peel the stick. Before he had given it the proper shape the dynasty of the Candahars was at an end, and with the point of the stick he wrote the name of the last of that race in the sand, and then resumed his work. By the time he had smoothed and polished the staff Kalpa was no longer the pole-star; and ere he had put on the ferule and the head adorned with precious stones, Brahma had awoke and slumbered many times. But why do I stay to mention these things? When the finishing stroke was put to his work, it suddenly expanded before the eyes of the astonished artist into the fairest of all the creations of Brahma. He had made a new system in making a staff, a world with full and fair proportions; in which, though the old cities and dynasties had passed away, fairer and more glorious ones had taken their places. And now he saw by the heap of shavings still fresh at his feet, that, for him and his work, the former lapse of time had been an illusion, and that no more time had elapsed than is required for a single scintillation from the brain of Brahma to fall on and inflame the tinder of a mortal brain. The material was pure, and his art was pure; how could the result be other than wonderful?

No face which we can give to a matter will stead us so well at last as the truth. This alone wears well. For the most part, we are not where we are, but in a false position. Through an infinity of our natures, we suppose a case, and put ourselves into it, and hence are in two cases at the same time, and it is doubly difficult to get out. In sane moments we regard only the facts, the case that is. Say what you have to say, not what you ought. Any truth is better than make-believe. Tom Hyde, the tinker, standing on the gallows, was asked if he had anything to say. "Tell the tailors," said he, "to remember to make a knot in their thread before they take the first stitch." His companion's prayer is forgotten.

However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. The fault-finder will find faults even in paradise. Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours, even in a

poorhouse. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse as brightly as from the rich man's abode; the snow melts before its door as early in the spring. I do not see but a quiet mind may live as contentedly there, and have as cheering thoughts, as in a palace. The town's poor seem to me often to live the most independent lives of any. Maybe they are simply great enough to receive without misgiving. Most think that they are above being supported by the town; but it oftener happens that they are not above supporting themselves by dishonest means, which should be more disreputable. Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage. Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, whether clothes or friends. Turn the old; return to them. Things do not change; we change. Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts. God will see that you do not want society. If I were confined to a corner of a garret all my days, like a spider, the world would be just as large to me while I had my thoughts about me. The philosopher said: "From an army of three divisions one can take away its general, and put it in disorder; from the man the most abject and vulgar one cannot take away his thought." Do not seek so anxiously to be developed, to subject yourself to many influences to be played on; it is all dissipation. Humility like darkness reveals the heavenly lights. The shadows of poverty and meanness gather around us, "and lo! creation widens to our view." We are often reminded that if there were bestowed on us the wealth of Croesus, our aims must still be the same, and our means essentially the same. Moreover, if you are restricted in your range by poverty, if you cannot buy books and newspapers, for instance, you are but confined to the most significant and vital experiences; you are compelled to deal with the material which yields the most sugar and the most starch. It is life near the bone where it is sweetest. You are defended from being a trifler. No man loses ever on a lower level by magnanimity on a higher. Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul.

I live in the angle of a leaden wall, into whose composition was poured a little alloy of bell-metal. Often, in the repose of my mid-day, there reaches my ears a confused *tintinnabulum* from without. It is the noise of my contemporaries. My neighbors tell me of their adventures with famous gentlemen and ladies, what notabilities they met at the dinner-table; but I am no more interested in such things than in the contents of the Daily Times. The interest and the conversation are about costume and manners chiefly; but a goose is a goose still, dress it as you will. They tell me of California and Texas, of England and the Indies, of the Hon. Mr.—of Georgia or of Massachusetts, all transient and fleeting phenomena, till I am ready to leap from their court-yard like the Mameluke bey. I delight to come to my bearings—not walk in procession with pomp and parade, in a conspicuous place, but to walk even with the Builder of the universe, if I may—not to live in this restless, nervous, bustling, trivial Nineteenth Century, but stand or sit thoughtfully while it goes by. What are men celebrating? They are all on a committee of arrangements, and hourly expect a speech from somebody. God is only the president of the day, and Webster is his orator. I love to weigh, to settle, to gravitate toward that which most strongly and rightfully attracts me—not hang by the beam of the scale and try to weigh less—not suppose a case, but take the case that is; to travel the only path I can, and that on which no power can resist me. It affords me no satisfaction to commerce to spring an arch before I have got a solid foundation. Let us not play at kittly-benders. There is a solid bottom everywhere. We read that the traveller asked the boy if the swamp before him had a hard bottom. The boy replied that it had. But presently the traveller's horse sank in up to the girths, and he observed to the boy, "I thought you said that this bog had a hard bottom." "So it has," answered the latter, "but you have not got half way to it yet." So it is with the bogs and quicksands of society; but he is an old boy that knows it. Only what is thought, said, or done at a certain rare coincidence is good. I would not be one of those who will foolishly drive a nail into mere lath and plastering; such a deed would keep me awake nights. Give me a hammer, and let me feel for the furring. Do not depend on the putty. Drive a nail home and clinch it so faithfully that you can wake up in the night and think of your work with satisfaction—a work at which you would not be ashamed to invoke the Muse. So will help you God, and so only. Every nail driven should be as another rivet in the machine of the universe, you carrying on the work.

Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth. I sat at a table where were rich food

and wine in abundance, and obsequious attendance, but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board. The hospitality was as cold as the ices. I thought that there was no need of ice to freeze them. They talked to me of the age of the wine and the fame of the vintage; but I thought of an older, a newer, and purer wine, of a more glorious vintage, which they had not got, and could not buy. The style, the house and grounds and "entertainment" pass for nothing with me. I called on the king, but he made me wait in his hall, and conducted like a man incapacitated for hospitality. There was a man in my neighborhood who lived in a hollow tree. His manners were truly regal. I should have done better had I called on him.

How long shall we sit in our porticoes practising idle and musty virtues, which any work would make impertinent? As if one were to begin the day with long-suffering, and hire a man to hoe his potatoes; and in the afternoon go forth to practise Christian meekness and charity with goodness aforethought! Consider the China pride and stagnant self-complacency of mankind. This generation inclines a little to congratulate itself on being the last of an illustrious line; and in Boston and London and Paris and Rome, thinking of its long descent, it speaks of its progress in art and science and literature with satisfaction. There are the Records of the Philosophical Societies, and the public Eulogies of *Great Men!* It is the good Adam contemplating his own virtue. "Yes, we have done great deeds, and sung divine songs, which shall never die"—that is, as long as we can remember them. The learned societies and great men of Assyria—where are they? What youthful philosophers and experimentalists we are! There is not one of my readers who has yet lived a whole human life. These may be but the spring months in the life of the race. If we have had the seven-years' itch, we have not seen the seventeen-year locust yet in Concord. We are acquainted with a mere pellicle of the globe on which we live. Most have not delved six feet beneath the surface, nor leaped as many above it. We know not where we are. Beside, we are sound asleep nearly half our time. Yet we esteem ourselves wise, and have an established order on the surface. Truly, we are deep thinkers, we are ambitious spirits! As I stand over the insect crawling amid the pine needles on the forest floor, and endeavoring to conceal itself from my sight, and ask myself why it will cherish those humble thoughts, and bide its head from me who might, perhaps, be its benefactor, and impart to its race some cheering information, I am reminded of the greater Benefactor and Intelligence that stands over me the human insect.

There is an incessant influx of novelty into the world, and yet we tolerate incredible dulness. I need only suggest what kind of sermons are still listened to in the most enlightened countries. There are such words as joy and sorrow, but they are only the burden of a psalm, sung with a nasal twang, while we believe in the ordinary and mean. We think that we can change our clothes only. It is said that the British Empire is very large and respectable, and that the United States are a first-rate power. We do not believe that a tide rises and falls behind every man which can float the British Empire like a chip, if he should ever harbor it in his mind. Who knows what sort of seventeen-year locust will next come out of the ground? The government of the world I live in was not framed, like that of Britain, in after-dinner conversations over the wine.

The life in us is like the water in the river. It may rise this year higher than man has ever known it, and flood the parched uplands; even this may be the eventful year, which will drown out all our muskrats. It was not always dry land where we dwell. I see far inland the banks which the stream anciently washed, before science began to record its freshets. Every one has heard the story which has gone the rounds of New England, of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which had stood in a farmer's kitchen for sixty years, first in Connecticut, and afterward in Massachusetts—from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still, as appeared by counting the annual layers beyond it; which was heard gnawing out for several weeks, hatched perchance by the heat of an urn. Who does not feel his faith in a resurrection and immortality strengthened by hearing of this? Who knows what beautiful and winged life, whose egg has been buried for ages under many concentric layers of woodenness in the dead dry life of society, deposited at first in the alburnum of the green and living tree, which has been gradually converted into the semblance of its

well-seasoned tomb—heard perchance gnawing out now for years by the astonished family of man, as they sat round the festive board—may unexpectedly come forth from amidst society's most trivial and handselled furniture, to enjoy its perfect summer life at last!

I do not say that John or Jonathan will realize all this; but such is the character of that morrow which mere lapse of time can never make to dawn. The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.

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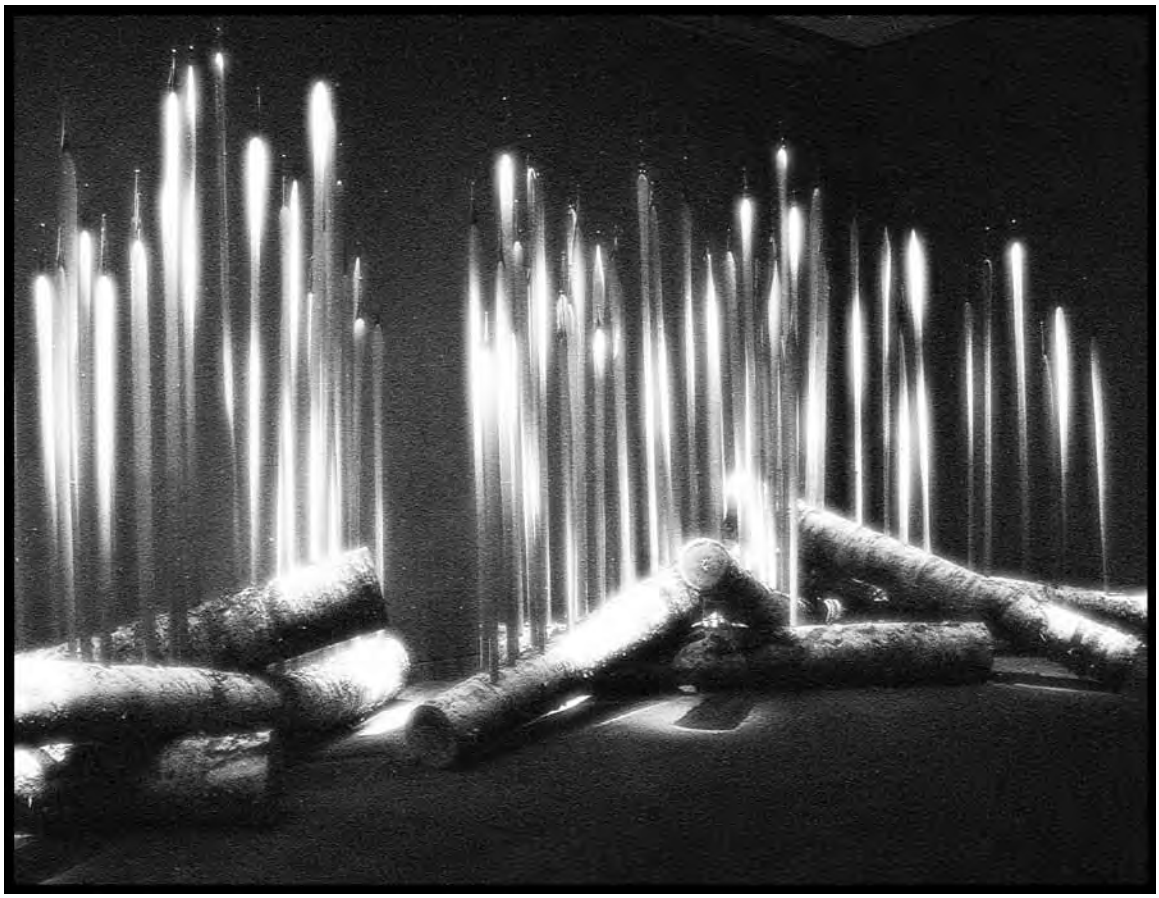


Judih Haggai

voices from Gaza
prayers and morning birds
music before dawn

* * *

any morning
birds sing
today's song a relief

* * *

bird tunes
comfort my heart
decision is born

* * *

Photo by Judih Haggai

what now, peacock
false shrieks this morning
a dance of ego

* * *

through dusty screen
clear sign of morning
birds before dawn

* * *

again
peacocks and i
awakened by boom

* * *

Photo by Judih Haggai

desert morning
crows signal another dry day

* * *

after heavy trucks
crow feasts
on furry carcass

* * *

fallen stork
on the side of the road
refuses to die

* * *

two voices
wander the path
fly and sparrow

* * *

some small bird
sings with full heart
this welcome day

* * *

silence calls
peacock calls back
all is well

* * * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Notes from New England

"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England*, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as* Notes from the Northwest, *& appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.*

Reflections on Return

Upon summer's commence I begin these lines, & they are pretty much the last ones for this issue of *The Cenacle*. Mulled this way & that what they would address & at least a couple of dead ends have come to this: it's a year soon since I've been back living in Boston, in New England, & this topic convinces me it's the best of all.

I come from Connecticut, & lived there until 1992 when, nearly 30 years of age, I moved to Boston to go to graduate school at Northeastern University. Master's in English. Lotta loans to float the deal. In truth I'd been trying to figure my way up here since 1983 when I took a college field trip here, just a day, it was enough. I think of Boston as the city itself & the smaller cities & towns that surround it. Cambridge, Brookline, Malden, Arlington, & so on. A sort of equivalent of the boroughs of New York City.

I arrived, went to school, worked, went to more school at Emerson College, ten years passed. Then I left in 2002, lived out West in Seattle & Portland for a year, then back to Connecticut to lick some wounds, then back to Seattle & Portland for seven years. Returned to Boston in early July 2010. And so.

I was tired of Boston in 2002, as much as I'd loved it for so long. I was laid off jobless, most of my local long-time friends were distant in one way or another &, worse, I'd fallen in love with a girl on the West Coast. The signs I chose to heed pointed me out there. I left to chase the hippie dream on the Left Coast.

Through most of 2002, Scriptor Press existed only online & at the Burning Man Arts Festival in Nevada. I wrote fixtion & poetry as ever but, aside from *The ElectroLounge* website, it wasn't to be found anywhere. *The Cenacle*'s gap in issues was 18 months, from #46 | June 2001 to #47 | December 2002.

Eventually I found a quite preferable girl & more steady days in the Pacific Northwest. For a long while I thought I'd settled out there. 2003 to 2010: that's a long time.

I came back here because the burnout feelings that led me away ground to dust & blew away. The dream of the West came & went too. I think home (like love & contentment) is a passing & passing, a shifting in place & form over time. Where I'd walked around this

metropolis 9 years ago thinking, "going, going," I now think, "returning, staying."

The year past has been a struggle among the pleasures. As of this writing, I have recently gotten work, took the year to do it, & am hopeful of a steadier stretch for awhile. So maybe moving more from returning to staying at last.

There have been moments that confirmed anew & anew the rightness of return. They are of many kinds: bringing the Jellicle Literary Guild back to its origins in New England; the change of Scriptor Press's name to Scriptor Press New England; that these *Notes* are again called *Notes from New England*.

More: seeing the delightful, obscure road movie *Scarecrow* at the well-hidden Harvard Film Archive (finding it from years-old memory), & afterward listening to its director, Jerry Schatzberg, speak proudly of his 38-year-old film; seeing the spectacular exhibition "Dale Chihuly: Through the Looking Glass" exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, no less to mention again being near Renoir's "Dance at Bougival" & the MFA's room-full of Impressionist paintings. Or the new Art of Americas wing.

Places: the exotic Forest Hills Cemetery in Jamaica Plain with its wonderful nineteenth-century aesthetic view of burying the dead as an art form; Winter Island up in Salem, its grass ruins of an old fort; Ogunquit on the southern Maine coast, its plentiful magic in winter time; the rocky little town of Rockport on the North Shore, its *ye olde* feeling escaped after a time to the Granite Pier's endless oceanside song.

The delights of finding new places to write: the friendly 24/7 Gourmet Market in Cambridge; the beautifully re-designed Marriott Hotel lounge at Copley Place in Boston; the large windowed and lovely Starbucks in Harvard Square. And the favorite old places like hoary old Diesel Café in Somerville, & the courtyard & café of this very Au Bon Pain, nearby that Harvard Square Starbucks.

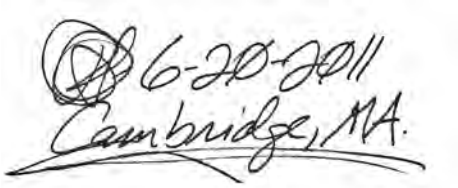
I see the area with a multiple vision, of what is here now, what was here when I lived here 1992 to 2002, & what I can recall from my visits up from Connecticut from 1983 to 1992. I see back & forth. There is mostly comfort, even delight. I never had this vision in Seattle or Portland. Others around me had it & I envied them. I was living in somebody else's book out there, no matter how hard I tried.

I conclude here with why I chose to write on this topic. When I left here in 2002, I didn't think I'd return. Then, over the years, I'd joke that someday I'd be an old man at this Au Bon Pain Café courtyard. Now I sit here.

But this too: I left here in 2002 jobless, lonely, tired, bent on chasing a fruitless dream. For years I didn't even visit. I didn't want to confront that departure, or its aftermath. For a year now I've been confronting it, how returning feels, how time passes, how nothing goes away & nothing returns. Being jobless here, years later but the same dark rage over it, not alone this time but still. Shut out from the better aspects of daily human traffic. Even now employed, the wounds of recent years remain, the lack of trust that a job will remain, that a bean-counter won't nod & cross out my name. Real, real, & time to smooth it out from live rage to remembered.

For all the mixtures of joys & sadnesses through my years-long relation with Boston, with New England, I can only say this: I don't wish to be anywhere else. Through my own worst hours & idiocies, I know this is true. It is, simply, what my brother Ric Amante calls *gratefulness*. Fears, yes, & regrets, sure, but hungers for new connections & renewed old ones, new plans to know more & remember better, & cultivate hope. It's not that I've earned my

return here; it's that, having returned, I earn my place here every day, every hour, sometimes better, sometimes worse. *Gratefulness*. Privilege. The wish to show my worth now to all those wandering years, that I remember them, & to the many times to come, better if I make them so.



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Spiders

This year's nightmares are next year's sonnets.
The words exist for people I don't know,
I write them to alleviate the guilt of a population—
people I've never met, people who never were.

It's all right, I tell them, *to regret your sins and sorrows.*
It's all right to lean into the corners of your couches
and beg for forgiveness. It's normal, I say,
to look into the ***Who's Who in America***

and want to see your name. You are right, to envy
the names there and to start counting your failures.
I know how it is: not receiving prizes reeks
of sweaty palms and botched attempts. Go ahead,

think these things through. Our lives are fragrant
with death, with the intrusion of aging, the reckoning
of death's influence on our desires and dreams, the desperate tenderness
in the face of certain oblivion.

Still, each poem tries to right last year's wrongs. I must
have been born to make something of my days . . .
After all, how many missing husbands does it take
to show the Black Widow what she really is?

There are consolations: we vibrate with remembered lust (there is
eroticism in every breath),
we arrange chaos to avoid boredom, and what we
leave behind disappears with rare tact.

* * *

Unfit Ghazal

Stroke the arm, the hand, the fingers opening like silk,
fingers lost in hair, arms flexing, unflexing like silk.

How young this makes us, how warm, pretty, smooth.
Only age understands this change, this stirring of silk.

We love the morning, the openness of ourselves to begin.
There is strength in the sun, strength cool and holy as silk.

The mirror touts me as younger than I am, maybe . . .
my lover says I open to him as does a robe of blue silk.

The stranger on the bus stared and my throat ached
for a drink, a whisky and soda, smooth as silk.

I challenge you to live this life, as full on as you can,
without shame, without fear, put on an armor of silk.

Hear that sound? It's the world's heart, pounding in your ears,
praying for your attention, praying for food, offering silk.

Along this dirt path, where glass and lizards glow,
A new berry bush is trying to prosper. Its leaves are silk.

* * *

Guerilla Whining

This poem is pounding on the door of your perceptions, groveling at the
knees of your conscience.
I offer you the precarious kiss of reality:
the work of the homeless—to survive one more night,
the limiting nature of nuclear incident,
the criminality of our prejudices,
the arrogance of our wealth.

The monsters of commerce call to us and we respond,
choking on $12.95 wine and caraway crackers.
The whites of the world's eyes
are blushing with exhaustion.
Good people have calloused lips from sucking the blame
out of the tall, frosted glasses
held by congressmen and princes.

We want to be dauntless in an era that begs us to forget,
to ignore Iraq, Abu Grahib, New Orleans.
The fragile white palm of a politician's hand,
forever urging the bloody adventures onward,
waving as the world's warring stride off to meet,
is the palm no one touches. We only imagine it and still it pushes,
directs, encourages and waves "goodbye."

Larry Levis says that "terror is a complete state of understanding." I get
that. I agree with that.
Politics is a meaningless famine; it gives us
the necessary vocabulary to discuss our new myths.
It is compensatory collateral that makes of us
sheep children, floating in nameless liquid,
in clear glass jars on the shelves of fucking hell.

* * * * * *

Photo by Jamie Sheehan

Nearly Saugus When I was Young

It is always nearly Saugus
No matter where I am,
Coming from anyplace, going to,
Sure as snow or crocus after
Or the clock turning on,
Sure as clam flats on air
And kelp bubbles breaking down
Under confection of dry salt
And the river knowing its wares
Through nine-foot cat-o-nines
Standing ripe as fire arrows.

Saugus announcements are made
With conviction all along the line.
In Linden, just south where
Four roads cross themselves neutral,
The sad, gray Hawkridge Brothers
Steel Company building lays its
Washboard face to the sun
And brings back old Mondays
And mother's sad red hands
Twisting denim almost dry,
And pain not quite touchable.

There is the blunt realism
Of the awesome bomb crater
Where the stone crusher
For years has harvested
The neat beehives of pulverized
Earth bone you cannot see over
Even if you were laddered.
Only the sea is past it,
Occasional sails, slow freighters
Like dominoes on the horizon.
Nothing to look for except *Outward,*
Past Revere and the dream beach.

Linden talks about Saugus
As you pass through its gauntlet
Of rail-side steel, neat square
Deliveries of girders, building guts,
Lally columns, T-bar stock stacked
Parallel to rust, inhibitions of trade,
Bankruptcy or intestate dreams;

And over there, where the earth
Has a mouth you cannot believe,
Where all the dead you've known
Could hide for a hundred years,
Where granite screams downward
From pent house dynamiting,
Where a bomb blast could run out
Of its own echoes all Saturdays,
Where dust reaches for the millennium
And ledge vibrations last all week
And the Earth talks in broken windows
And plastered ceilings sneer wall to wall
Like lunatics on yesterday's back porch,
Saugus says it's here.

Lynn announces, too,
Though on the other side
And aches at the touch
Of a shoe last found cheaply
At a Saturday yard sale.
Lynn has walked the border
Only in dead winter when the river
Zippers the towns together
At a barometer's instigation
And thermometer's direction.
The parts meet where industry
Heaves upward red mickey spires
Erecting at dollar signs,
Government contracts, defense
And offense better planned
In a Manning Bowl locker room.

Lynn says hello to Saugus.
I wave back, the tracks
Of the Linden Branch walk under
My feet like I am skipping rope
And the cinders from a thousand
Dead engines and more Pullmans
Than you can shake a fist at
Litter the way onto Saugus
Even where the river collapses
Under the State Theater
Where now centerless grinders
Reel on like old serials
With week-long after-tastes.

No matter how I go at Saugus.
By Linden or Lynn, Schenectady or sin,
Collegiate enterprise or business boredom,
By rock slabs and earth holes
And ores crossed in a man's mind
And guard rails narrowed to infinity,
Nothing prepares the way better
For coming home than the flotsam
Freed upon the air, old friends
Cornerwise on busy days,
Old train whistles falling across
Donkey Field chockfull of October,
Where Halloween goes orange
And shaggy-toothed and waxy,
For nothing ever said I would ever
Write a poem about coming here
To read a poem about going there.

* * * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Labyrinthine
[a new fixtion]

Part Five.
(continued)

"Out here on the perimeter there are no stars
Out here we is stoned—immaculate"
—The Doors,
"The Wasp (Texas Radio & the Big Beat," 1971.

ix. (xcii.)

"Climb enough till walking & then enough to run" Maya reads in her book, looks at me, nods, reads on: "They say the world downs every man, one day, some year. I hear it in these barroom's walls every night. One after another will stand up to the night, to the unseen overlords of the planet, shout til empty, sit again among his fellows."

"What this?"
"Keep reading."
"Which version is this. You or him?"
"I'm the one who won't fuck you along the way to getting you to Dylan."
"Oh."
"Do you have his manuscript still?"
"Yes. Do you want it?"
"I can't have what I want, Maya."
"What's that?"
"A young man's heart again."
"Is that why?"
"Why what?"
"Why you won't be with me?"
"Read, Maya."

She turns the page: "Slinking hours at a distance, a smile in gauze, the trembling talk of books." He nearly appears. Nearly *here*. "What fineness in hungers lost, streets where shoulders knocked with high plans, moon an allie, dawn's fresh page."

Here. He was! She starts. No maybe.
Dylan?

"The years drown in watching the world hustle many charms & lies, arguments for answers, the blunt lure of flesh for plumage, the driving, wild wish for warmth. Drinking hours at a distance, still wanting after what they didn't reveal."

He pauses. Breathes, with pain. *This*. This! He told her she would meet Dylan, told her they would be sundered awhile. Told her the rest will be up to her.

She curls again in grasp, this is safety, this is what she knew of it. *This*. What being with Dylan made me feel like again.

"Maya?"
"What? Fuck."
"That manuscript. Write it. Now. Hereon."
"Mine? A third?"
"Write it."

It wasn't the place I ran from, that pathetic cult. Before that. It wasn't for long. He was sick.

But—I don't know how to write this—he took me from the White Woods—I don't know what all this is—

I'm the key because I was grown for a purpose—how is this all coming back to me?

Read, Maya. Read more: "Tonight, again, I know nothing, I am nobody. Singing to manifest, crawling the dust."

I stop. Remember. "You were raised to purpose, Maya, the first of your kind to survive." I look at him & I don't know. He touches my cheek & brushes back my hair. "The ships overhead sought, seek to liberate us from ourselves, our laws, our mores. The way we divide us up by language, by nation-state, by other foolish criteria.

"You cannot breed, Maya, & furthermore the one who attempts to couple with you is rendered impotent. You were grown to be erotically irresistible to males, & to begin the slow thinning of humanity. Soon there will be others already in the population who are changed over for the purpose."

I asked him why.

"They feel it's time. This is the most merciful way."
"But you saved me."
"Not for long. Just this little while between us."

I remember how his voice went through me, softened how it felt, this horror. I don't know how to explain it. I came to him barely conscious, waked from something. This man brought me from the White Woods, saved me, sacrificed himself, to tell me what I was.

"I don't want to hurt anyone."
"You won't. You will help. It's why you're with me now."
None of it made sense but what it seemed to come down to is that I was rendered opposite of what they intended.
"You will not neuter. You will fertilize."

I look at him.
"I will give you the code. When you first couple, this code will pass between you & your lover."
I look at him still.
"It will change things. Undo all. The web will begin to unweave."

We shared the code, & I cradled his head while he died. Then I returned to the White Woods to continue on, what Global Wall thought of as his grand effort to breach space & time & recover himself, reach through the already existing history of the cosmos & rent it of his fury & pain. I was central to his plan because he did not know what I was. I'd forgotten. But I escaped him.

"Why tonight?"
"What?"
"All this? Until tonight, until I read what I just read, I did not remember any of it. Him."
"There's more. Read on."
"No. Tell me."
"I don't know."
"Tell me."
"You're going to see Dylan. You had to remember."
"So I know he's getting the code from me?"
"You won't let me keep you from him."
"What happens after?"
"I don't know."
"That man died to give me this. Will Dylan die?"
"No. Nobody will die."
"I will see him?"
"Yes."
"He loves me?"
"Yes, Maya."
"That's not enough, it is?"
"No. It never is."
"He'll be in danger too."
"He'll bear the code."
"Are you trying to get me to stop? To save him?"
"No. He's the one."
"What then?"
"There are other forces than the ships above. Other meanings to the code inside you."
"Other codes?"
"Yes."

"Will I lose him?"
"No."
"What then?"
"Read on."
"What? Tell me!"
"*Read on, Maya*."

She reads: "Study the web, pray the hours. Watch one man in a doorway guard his plastic bags, thrown a coin by a couple sparkling wetly with drink & easy thoughts of silked mirrors, cuffs & cocaine, stereo moans."

"Why did you have to die?"
"It was transformation, Maya."
"What do you mean?"
"I was in a man's form for a very short while. Long enough to retrieve you, give you the code to reverse the effects."
"So I will fertilize Dylan."
"Yes."
"How?"
"I told you then. To change things. Undo all. The web will begin to unweave."
"Yes, tonight I am remembering all of this. Tell me what that means."
"What Global Wall wanted, only greater."
"Tell me!"
"I can't."
"Do you know?"
"I believe."
"Believe who?"
She looks around. He's gone. However he had come back again. Whatever this was.

The drinkers turn to each other as the TV goes dark with a strange puff of smoke.
"OK then."
"So we're gonna watch them get it on? The girl & Dylan?"
"I doubt it."
"Why? We waited long enough. Don't you want to see that hot little piece get the business?"
"I'd like to be the business she gets!"
"Me too!"
"Nah. You'd break her."
"She'd have a smile on her face!"
"You would at least."
"This show doesn't work like that. You know how it is. Gets us all worked up for something but then it's like . . . the writers forget the story or something, & they go on to something else. Then, if they come back, it's all different."
"So we're never gonna get a good look inside them white panties of hers?"
"How do you know they're white?"
"How do you know she's wearing any?"

"She could have on a black g-string with a nice shaved bush."
"Mm. Nice & tight too."
The drinkers quaff deeply at this comment. Think on it.
"Bet that ass is round & priss-teen."
"Cherry for the crackin'!"
"Cmon, they all look sweet & cherry. How many are?"
"I think this one really is. You heard the show. She's gonna fertilize the boy."
"What the hell did that mean anyway? All that sci-fi mumbo jumbo."
"Well it ain't no *Star Track*!"
"Nah. More like something dark & twisted. I sometimes wonder if I'm having dreams about that show."
"About that girl. Wet dreams."
"No. Well, yah, but it's not fun. I'm not humping her. It's more like I'm one more fucked-up face in the story."
"Yah. I get those too."
"Hey, all of us then. What does it mean?"

Mr. Bob speaks up at this point.
"It means either you're characters in a book, or that you need more life outside this bar."
Pause.
"I don't mind being a character if I could have some of that. That boy's not gonna handle it. You got tight young poon like that, the man's gotta saddle it, break it, make it hurt a little, & howl too."
"Spoken like a regular barroom Chaucer."
"Look, I'm just saying—"
"Yah, you've had poon like that a million times"
"Look"
"Hey, another round. Don't worry, nobody's driving tonight."

Mr. Bob grimaces, & pours—

They're sitting together, briefly, a table, a restaurant, fast cheap food, neon, cartoon menu, the drunks come & go, it's Saturday night—

Watch a man slip from his seat, slowly, his deeper slumbering body giving over gradually to gravity, a bloom falling closed—

to the floor, it cannot be, him among his foodstuffs, tatters among tatters, no, money is spending here, commerce is chugging here, product exchanged for coin, feeding here, feeding—

the lights flash & arrive, several men in powerful costume, ready weapons, lead him outside, allow him a moment's resistance for a cigarette, then a van arrives, & he is coaxed away, there is not in him imagination or resource enough to resist—

They've sat watching, sharing in this, not knowing how or why here, or how long—

"Dylan" barely a whisper
"Maya" barely more
"How much do you know?"
"I love you."

& gone.

She continues to watch, sees another man now sitting where the other had, & another in an hour, & another in turn. Each shovels in the cheap food & departs. Despair.

No. "I love you" It's enough for now. Not that it should be but it is.

She writes, with me, my words, her pen, her paper: "*Tonight I still beat at narrow faith, at vows thin of mystery & pleasure, I am reaching for the hungrier words to sing, to burn, to reveal.*" She, we, stop, look around.
"Will he be back?"
"He never leaves, Maya."
"No." Her blue eyes fierce toward crimson, turn purple.
"You want certainty in the world, Maya."
"Just him."
"You can write him here. Right next to you. In place of me. You can."

More words to page, her pen: "*New sounds of the sea in my blood, next page, the way on.*" Then she writes & we spake aloud: "*Tonight I will not drown.*" Again: "*Tonight I will not drown.*" Again: "*Tonight I will not drown.*"

"You'll like the power."
"Like you do."
"Maybe."
"Is it sexual to you?" Curious, almost shy.
"It's all sexual to me, Maya. Nothing lacks it."
"Why don't you take me?"
"That's him."
"No. You."
I give myself a moment. "Your power over me has more to its scent than cherry cunt."
"I can't do this like you."
"But you can, possibly, do something."
"Like your Rebecca, younger? Not married to you."
"Partially, but not all. She'd understand."
"Would she?"
"You're muse, Maya, like she is, like the rest since & hereon. Doesn't slow, doesn't simplify. I didn't cut the path."
"But you won't stop fighting it."
"The war's in blood & music, it's not a choice."
"No."

"And?"
"When do I get to fuck him?"
"I don't know."
"Soon. Will be good for all of us when I do. Trust me."
I nod. Do.

x. (cxi.)

"Hope honey me again tonight, I've found I'm looking wrong ways for you & see none—crush between tips then fling me seeds to the shadow & breeze—"

"What kind of show is that?"
"I don't know. We have enough batteries to listen for a little while longer."

"The cafes & the woods are same for the chase I keep, toward answers that murmur raise—toward answers that cause any feeling at all—"

"He sounds sad."
"I think he is."
"Are you like him?"
"No. I have the three of you."

He'd left, nobody'd known, but he was long gone all that, as much as this was possible. Had intended to go alone, but hadn't. These were the last ones brought in, new supplies for a failed experiment, they'd come with him.

What had happened recently? These three weren't afraid of him, followed him closely, listened every dear word. The oldest of them was willing, if he cared to.

They listened.

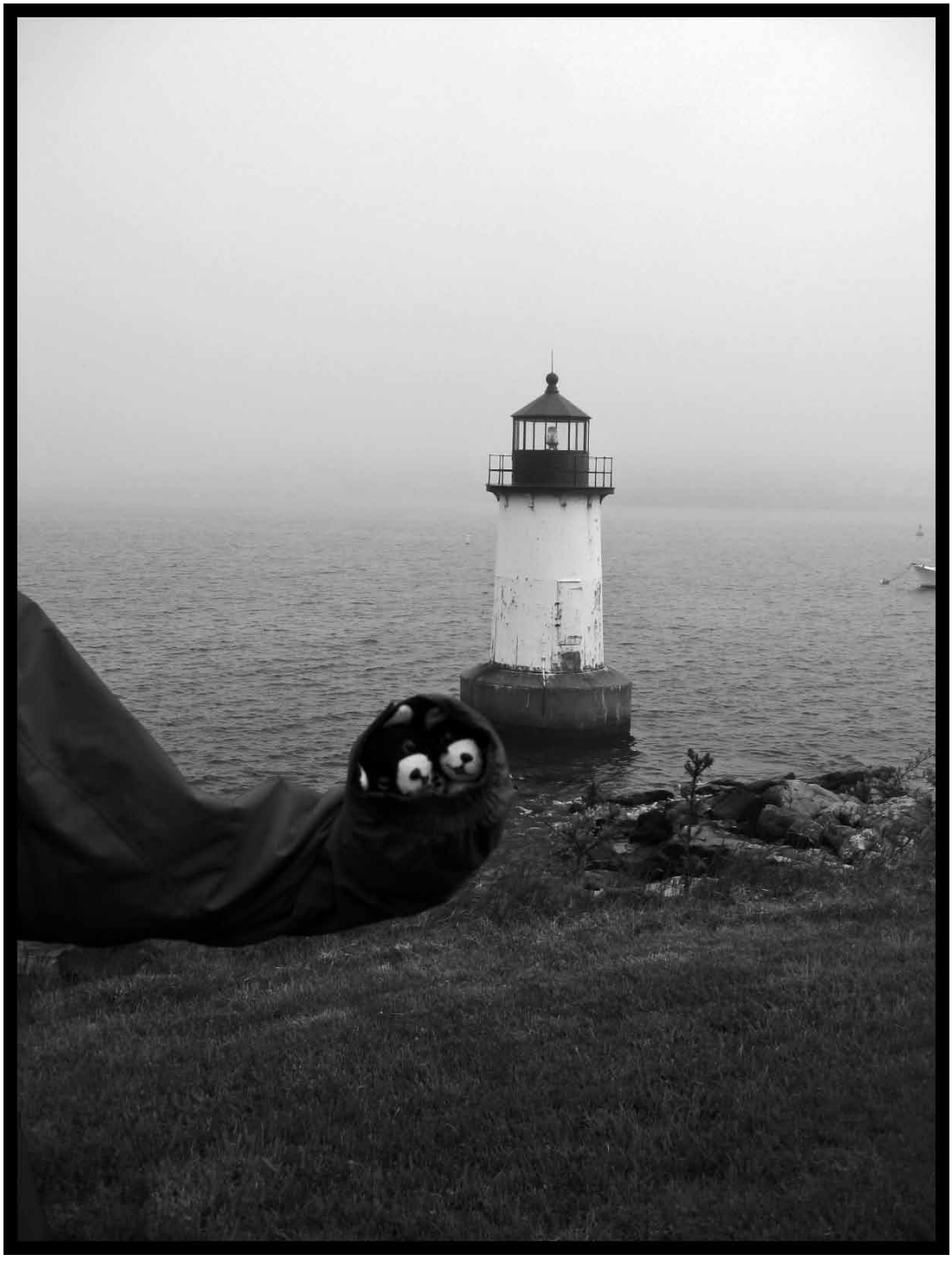
"—a travel past the hustle of a man's deepest lies made law, music & tragedy of a laughing boozy half-harnessed tit"

They slept with him, there never had been a question. Smiled a lot at what they knew of his likes & what they did not. Lace, of course. Thoughtfulness, strangely. They tried. Remembered dreams, perhaps most.

He considered the oldest, the others knew she would be first when, if, he said so. Would wait their turns.

Next motel room requested two beds. She knew almost nothing, but he had separated her out. She listens.

"Hope hunger me again tonight, press toward one stream these hard-twined paths, answers to release the beast & explain the blow"—



He pushed the two beds together—there would be no separation—they curled around him—the radio clicked off. Batteries cost money.

They kept moving but their money was low. They ate once a day. He made it fun. He was kind. They shared him unselfishly, he'd taught them this is what he liked, what pleased him.

There were rules. Speak to nobody of purpose, destiny, or even name. He worried sometimes they might slip but they watched each other, there seemed dangers in not listening, in others & what they might do.

"Would they take us?"
"Maybe just one?"
"No."
"No."
"We don't need anyone else."
"Who else would we need?"

He planned to return to work soon. He'd told them. It was scary, strange.

"Do you talk to them like you talk to us?"
"No. They do not belong to me, nor I to them. I give them something else."

She thought about it more. Felt eyes on her. Felt things curl within her. A pressure, a slow ache. Even his least touch bothered her.

She'd almost gone with someone that time.

He talked strange. He smiled at her chest. He sweated a little.
"Do you have a boyfriend?"
"No."
"Is that your family you're traveling with?"
"Yes."
"You're the prettiest."
She smiled & the ache flamed her cheeks. She'd come outside early morning because sleeping with all of them was too much.
"Do I make you uncomfortable?"
"No."
"Everyone else is asleep?"
"Yes."
"Come to my room for a little while. So they can sleep."

His bed was bigger then theirs. It surprised her at first when he didn't turn on the lights but then she knew. It was OK. Wasn't it? She'd come in here of her own mind. He was back there sleeping. He wouldn't touch her like this, murmuring how pretty she was, how sexy, kissing her like this, softly then with something painful in him, not hurting her but she felt it, as he

pushed aside her bathrobe & groaned at what little lace she had on, groaned almost in fear of himself, her new ripeness, shhh, yes, untouched in this way, yesss, good, moan in my ear, yes, cherry as can be let's me touch, let's me taste, let's me undress, suddenly remembering her old man, what was it about him, something, something that had scared him, made him want to pluck one of those blossoms for his own but here she was, not knowing what to do next but by his guidance, willing but—

"What's wrong?"
"Go back to your room"
"Why? I was . . . liking it"
"Go now."
"Why are you mad?"
"Go now."
He dresses her, sheafing as much of every inch of all that as he can, without touching, without breathing, something wrong in all this, very fucking wrong, this is a set-up! *Is he a fucking cop!*

She leaves guileless & his whole body heaves at the sweet weightless look on her face as she closes the door. He packs, he dresses, he leaves in a white panic for whatever the fuck *that* was he doesn't want to know & does want to leave it five hundred miles behind by noon—

She returns to their room, to their bed. Silence.

"Touch it."
"What?"
"Touch it now."

He'd left at that moment, that break in things, when all changed & little noticed. He'd dreamed something was coming, that there was a way out—

or had he caused the silence, the agreement of some kind, the hushing empty of sound? He knew too well what time wasn't, what little it truly lorded, how—

her teeth gnaw him a little too painfully & he convulses—

"I'm sorry!"
"It's OK."
"Are you hurt?"
"No."
"I'm really sorry." Nearly crying.
"Some like a little pain."
"They do?"
"Yes. More than that even."
"Do you?"
"Sometimes." She relaxes a little but does not continue. He notices the breathing in the other bed. Both are awake, watching in the dim. Listening.

What he knew was that the White Woods never ended, never ends. He knew this & yet others did not, & lived without this knowledge. Lived & perished.

So was knowing an advantage?

She crawled up into his arms, half atop him. Within reach her young round ass, untouched, her small perfect breasts. Her pale thighs & bare rose pussy. Long dark blonde hair, aching pretty blue eyes. If he'd positioned himself beneath or above her, entered her deeply, she'd have winced, let, eventually enjoyed. The listening pair would know this was what to do.

He instead held her lightly, something in this, something else.

Why had he taken them with him? What now?

How had he gotten out? The more he tried to order the events the more they did not make sense.

What would he preach when he returned to the stage? His grand project had been a failure.

What he'd learned was that time lords over at least two things: mortal being & the human heart. Maybe, from what he'd read, the heart of any even slightly conscious being.

It hadn't worked, going back to that moment before his heart was first damaged, he could not undo it. It wasn't clear what had happened but it was like he was occupying his own young body with his grown adult . . . soul? What word?

They could not co-exist & he overwhelmed the boy. He pulled back because filling the youth with all he brought with him had overwhelmed him, with some wonder, more despair, great sadness. Too much. Before he could break apart, self-destruct, Global Wall had retreated back.

There was fire, disruption, a sense of invasion & destruction. Of course he had known it would happen & used what he knew to withdraw all that mattered. What burned was not his compound but simply the White Woods they occupied. And White Woods do not burn.

She's kissing down there again, learning, wanting to learn, her soft lips make his cock ripe quickly, painfully. Licks his crown with her sweet tongue. Positions her mouth better to take more of him deep in. The others watch.

He didn't like to think he'd essentially run away. But nothing had mattered after the failure. The spirit of the place quickly failed. His man warned him to decide: renew his work or let them all go. Of course he knew his man had betrayed him, in a sense. How else would Maya have escaped?

Yet she'd come back. And everything still failed.

His thoughts go blind as her sucking smooths & deepens. Somehow she has crawled on top of him, moved so her cherry cunt is near, wanting him to enjoy her too. He licks perfection once, twice, then comes with overwhelming force, quickly & hard & severally, she starts to choke &

tries to climb off.

"Swallow it all."
She fights panic, breathes through nose & chokes down his come. Feels his tongue gently sliding inside her & tries not to wrench. Having swallowed most of it, she more easily gets the rest of it. Then his tongue does something, touches some part inside her, & again, & her body thrashes from deep within & she cries out. Again, that touch there, again. She comes so hard that she nearly crashes off the bed but for his sudden saving grasp of her.

The others, fascinated & terrified, watch motionlessly.

The TV station flips to a live scene of cheering, 150,000 or more cheering for a tall thin black man who stands alone on a large stage speaking.

"Yes we can!" he cries.

"Yes we can!" he echoes.

The crowd at Luna T's Cafe's bar, glad of their TV working for once, cries out thunderously.

I sit apart, thinking to myself: I'm so happy I made it to this night. For so long I've walked among the resistance—at times hardly more angry than hopeless—& it didn't even seem that things needed to be so bad—nor had they always been—yet the days & months & years did not cease them—soon even the rotten leaders were mauling each other, shifting blame all around—I don't suppose any of this was unique—humans greed for power & yet rarely keep their ideals & decency when it's been won—

Will this new leader be different? Perhaps. If his desire to do good remains more powerful than his weaknesses—if he keeps to the high road he tries to walk—if he is terribly lucky. If he keeps his heart lined with hope & his thoughts close to the single fate the greatest to the least of us takes a hand in authoring. If his mistakes are few, acknowledged, kept as lessons & reminders. If he remains humble before the world's many mysteries, even as he inspires many to suckle their juice for knowledge & pleasure. If, finally, those who made him their leader feel, most of their hours, that his gestures onward are toward what each of them can reach, & better likely reach as a strange & various whole. I wish him the good fortune we each of us deserves.

We keep moving, it rules our hours. At first I let this be enough, & they accept, they are with me, with each other, all is adventure.

What of their other lives? What indeed. It had been years since I'd done the legwork ahead of acquisitions. Didn't know or care toward the end. They were fuel, all was fuel. Then it failed.

It failed & I was back.

Now I was with these three & we were . . . running? No. I'd set it to consume itself back to root & seed. Even my man couldn't undo it. He didn't know the plan.

Only Benny knew. Or rather only Benny knew where the plan originated. Benny wasn't telling.

So we're not moving from, or at least fleeing—toward then?

They don't ask for the longest time. Then, not long after the first time I let her suck my

cock, she boldens & asks.

My temptation is to swat her. I don't. Redemption wears a thousand thousand faces.

"Do you want to go home?"

"I. No. No! Please!"

"Relax. I was just asking."

"No." She wants to say more, her confused heart without its own language yet, her newly enflamed cherry cunt.

"It's OK."

"Are we in trouble?"

"With who?"

"I don't know." What she wants to say is, can you keep touching me & start fucking me soon, without it going wrong? Somewhere something's wrong & I'm afraid.

"No. We're going to see a friend of mine."

"Who."

"His name is Benny. He's nice."

She wonders if Benny will touch her deeply too. Wonders if she'll like it. Wonders if I can read her mind. Dirty girl.

She's nearly in tears & my gross imaginings don't matter for how much truth or bullshit in them.

She needs instruction, or think she does. "Take care of the others when I need you to." She nods, solemnly. "Don't worry. You three belong to me." Within she still leans forward, eager, brutally hungry for that additional word.

"When they're ready, they will join you with us." She nods, takes it. At least she gets more for awhile.

We keep moving. It's not that hard. Our van is electric. I charge it on rest-stop wall-plugs.

Seeing Benny doesn't require travel of course. It shouldn't.

How to say this. Benny *hides* these days. He's paranoid. We're going somewhere he'll trust to meet me. Maybe meet my girls.

I consider them again. Not a burden, more a mystery. Exactly what a darkly ironic god would let me end up with.

They watch me. They adjust as I wish. There is a lover's wish to please in each of them. A tendency to envy the others their amount of attention. Then cease that when I frown. Expectancy without facts. Curiosity. Some sense of gratefulness I'd call weird if anything. Essentially, we are tribe however I wish to define.

Benny has always been leery of me, of my project, of my ways, how I move between worlds

"You shouldn't be able to come here"
"Others have. You know the idea of Dreamland is misrepresentation. A ruse."
"Not a ruse. A protection."
"Protecting who from what? You are on this side of an illusory wall & you've found your mission in reinforcing that illusion."
"But you—"
"Yes and others"

"Not many. Not often."
"Yes, you've said that. Often."
"I've never known how."
"Do you think it's one way? Some conceptional hole in the dyke you can plug?"
He smiles. "It won't work, what you're doing." Loved telling me this. I denied him every time. But he was right. At least my approach was wrong. Or my execution. Timing? I don't know. What I do know is that things are different. I had many; they were fuel. I have three now. They are what my man was to me. Or maybe that's what I want—

The oldest is too curious & the others follow her lead. They discuss who Benny might be. What begins to disturb me is the youngest seems to have an idea. I overhear her tell the others one day what she thinks. In truth, I leave them alone from time to time with the motel room bugged. Some things don't change.

"Where do you think Benny lives?"
"A big house. On a big hill."
"On top of a mountain?"
"No," she says. "He lives in the woods."
"What woods?"
"The ones in my dreams. We're going to the woods in my dreams to see him."

So I take notice of her. I think that's what she wants. Eventually I begin to think that's what she intended, saying that. I tell the oldest that the others should take their turn with me.

"Why?"
"Fair's fair."
She pouts. A pout some would pay gold to behold beside them in a bed.
"It's what I need to happen."
"Will Benny keep one of us?" she says suddenly.
I see my opening & strike. "Not you," I say. It works. Her smile confesses this. Bag-o-gold smile.

Two rooms. I purchase us two rooms at the next motel. I have to know & what methods I use are uncertain. Any, all, new ones. I instruct the other two to prepare her for me. Ribbons, I nod. Lace & cotton. Make-up, no. Not even for their play.

The oldest one glints, she misunderstands that the girl is being prepared to go with Benny. The middle one may know a bit. But not much.

The room is lighted by candles & mellowed by strange, low music. She enters, alone, & shuts the door with quiet finality. Is ready, is resigned, is eager? Will please.

"Turn." I sit in shadows. My word catches her & she stills, now notices that the room contains no bed. Candles & mirrors & disquieting smoke. The distracting music.

She does a full turn. She's blonde, her eyes crimson, hair, in loose braids, partway down her back. Her body is untried but I can sniff its fecundity, its coiled readiness to be steered, possessed, in turn a cry, a moan, now possessor.

"Bend" The older one dressed her well, her nightgown perfectly bears her small, round breasts, their pertness is erotic, nubile, a challenge. The slope of her thigh is smooth, perfect. Her hair recalls me again as it drifts to one side & the countless candles illumine the several fine bones of her neck, shoulder.

Though moving in an abstruse environ, mirrors, candles, smoke, she finds me, kneels before me. Seeming ready to serve, to please.

"Who do you belong to?"
"I belong . . . to you."
I restrain a violent pulse & breathe.
"Who is Maya?"
"Maya?"
I lightly grip her lace frock & tear it open, her sweet breasts now half showing. She does not flinch.
"You belong to Benny."
"No."
"Don't lie."
She looks at me with a dignity not possible for a girl in a torn nightie on her knees. "No."
I breathe. Twice. Relax. The music calms me. Reaching forward I pull the garment over her head. Now in white panties, crimson roses. The oldest one's touch, her comment.
"And the Bridge of Glass?"
She stands, moves nearer me.
"The White Woods?"
She is now in my grasp. Her skin's natural scent drowns me of smoke, of music.
"Preacher?"
She takes my hand down, curled with me, my hand, down, among the crimson roses, to one bud perfect of all, shining, now wetly, my fingers touch as her mouth nears mine, this is poison I think, poison, the world's poison, perfect rose, touch, touch deeper, she moans inside me, & what gives way———

xi. (cx.)

Night flashes through me, an anxious traffic, among human spillage from taverns——

Maya stops writing. Wishes to leave this place. Dylan wasn't here. She didn't want him here—

She writes: *Dreams to come of hawks high on empty arroyos, & babies a soft mystery—*

no—the code. She starts. Tries to remember how girls are supposed to dress. Not like her, too skinny in jeans & Hendrix shirt. Her favorite. She knew about him, how much he liked girls &

music. She'd heard him laughing on the radio, it was nice, even shy—he was like Dylan—the code. Shit.

She writes again: *babies a soft mystery in my arms, dreams of tomorrow's fractured news.*

Stops. Watches the girls in this place, their clothes, their smiles. She's not them. Doesn't want to be. This isn't much of a thought yet—

She writes: *Universe I am asking for help, & strength, for the best of what's left in me—*

What I was, what I am. There are some who understand, many who don't.

I think—go slow—I have to act with strength—even if I don't believe I have a lot—I'm not who I was but that's only partway.

Someone staggers up, drunkenly, smelling of streets & piss. "Got fifty cents so I can get the bus?"
"Sit down."
"No. No trouble. I just need a bus over the bridge."
"Sit down."
He sits. He's drunk, hungry, poor. His bag doesn't look to have much.
"What's your name?"
"Just fifty cents" he whispers.
"I'm Maya. Tell me your name."
"It doesn't matter."
"It does to me."
"I can go."
"No. Stay."
"I don't want no trouble. You're kind of young for this."
"For what?"
"Nothing. Nothing!" Now he's starting to panic.
"Sit" she says quietly.
Terrified, he sits back down at their table.
"Thank you."
"No problem."
"What is your name?"
"Dean."
"Hello Dean."
"Hello."
"Do you remember my name?"
"Mary?"
"Maya. It means illusion. Or dream, or play."
"Oh."
"I need to find someone, Dean."
"I just need bus money."

She takes his hand, it's not so much dirty up close as a well-worn hand, a laborer's hand.
"You're going to take me to him."
"Who?"
"Dylan."
"Who?"
She leans forward & he looks ready to cry.
"Dylan."
"Where is he?"
"The White Woods."
He leans back & laughs like crooked teeth. "We're all there."
She stares at him. "How do you know about them?"
"I live on the streets some nights."
He nods, mumbles to himself, forgetting her.
"I want you to lead me to him."
"Why me?"
She pricks his eyes close to blinding.
"You look dangerous & crazy. I look young enough to be your daughter. That will be enough for most."
His body feels shot full of iron bars.
"When you help me find him I will give something back to you."
"Everything I had is gone. Look at me."
"No." Her look holds him close but not painful this time.
They stand up & leave before the store manager can reach them.

xii. (cix.)

Where the strength to elude the Beast & win the hour? I ask & ask again. Mend fractured wishes into Beauty, slip through heart's hungry maze, blow up in new song?

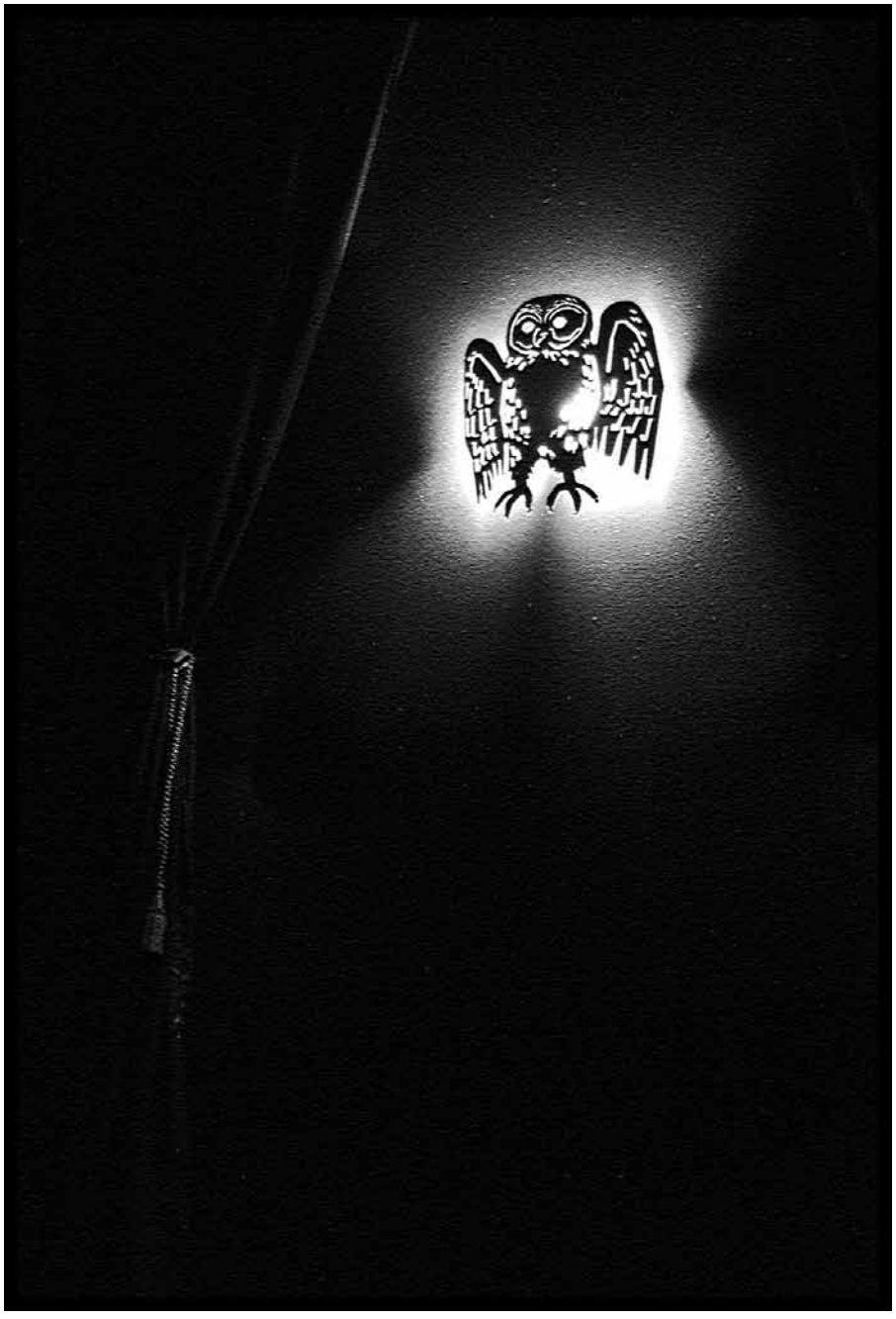
I feel these hours rent of energy, each word sometimes just the labored breath of pushing along.

I feel weak & mortal awhile & stumble within, grope for the novel & find little—the power seems elsewhere—or—so—it seems—

Space. Imaginal space. The best of it. The rest. Malleable. Give a little push. Feel the push back. Give another. It gets easier. Just remember. One minute to the next. An hour & another. Push, push back.

Neither slave to a passing struggle nor a helpless moan blaming coin, king, & cunt in defeat. Push, push a little more. Imaginal space, & ask: imaginal space?

World blooms through wars, through every flesh's cry & fall. Through the hours won, lost, & abandoned, world blooms, open hand, & a wish for each, no matter what I am, no matter what you are.



Your choice now, Bowie, man or mushroom?

I glare about me Universe & say something more, something else, something new. Glare about me not wishing to control but partner, collaborate better in this making, in what possible, how much more could be true.

I glare about me & wish to know better how to move, move aside, move through—

"Benny, how?"
"Asking me?"
"Asking. How?"
"Not less. More."
"More what?"
"Don't retreat. Work harder. Push & push."
"Not let go? Release?"
"No. Not enough yet. Not nearly enough."

I nod.

The day's news headlines told of one nation invading another, & a general's boast of how many targets awaited, we will crush you, crush you, the firepower we bear is goodly, Godly, each explosion speaks our blood vengeance for every dark memory, every wife & child we've lost to you, every home & marketplace, we will crush you & more, you will never harm us again, our God-possessed weapons will annihilate your bodies & your very souls, your way of life, plots & plans, what you believe, what you love, what you hold waits beyond this world, feel this anger that our countless generations have cumed, the cries of our rent mothers & fallen kings, & baby-faced soldiers with their limbs & guts gone, feel it, feel *us*, each of us, as we crush you, destroy your crops & your roads & your bridges as you have destroyed ours but you did so with a false god, thus a false premise to your idea of who would finally vanquish whom, for you see you are the evil we speak of in our sacred stories, you are the other, the terror beyond hills & woods & dunes, what we train our children to loathe, to fear, to cry out in fullthroated triumph as it is destroyed. Your soldiers, your women, your soldiers, your old men & women. Your kings & presidents. Your artwork & sacred books. Your calm scenery & Sunday outings. You cannot live that we may. We may, we *must*. We *will*. You are whom we vanquish, & how our God will praise us & bless us with eternal prosperity, with fruitful lands & newly married wombs. Our preachers gesture us toward these hoped-for days, *a month & a year & a century after we have destroyed you, & others like you in this world about us, & others to come in other times. Peach will come fully & finally when you are each & every & all dead & we the blessed, we the people of the true god have no more fears to worry about when we walk our children in the park, pray in our houses of worship, gather for trade in our marketplaces. Ever & ever. All of you must die. Our true God allows us no other option ever as your false god says the same. Blood speaks one truth. Our God speaks one truth. Paradise builds from your graveyard.*

xiii. (cviii.)

Someone sang, "Knowledge sums endless, wisdom ever gives way," & pointed to the countless drummers & their dancers crying up the dust. Nodded, sang again, just a word, "Beguiled," & fell into the storm.

Dylan watched, this was before, he watched the singer sing, & point, & nod, & sing again, & fall into the storm.

The was before he looked at me.

"You follow him into the desert, & then cease to follow."

"Why?"

"That's my line."

"I'm asking." He's polite. There's none of the violent sexual combustion just Maya & I talking brings. He's asking, he wishes to know. Perhaps I know. Or should know. The last bit of sarcasm is not his.

I nod. "This is a story."

"Fixtion."

"Yes. Your word from a long time ago."

"Yes it is."

"To fix."

"Yes."

"Fix what?"

"Fix the world, I guess. Or just fix me. I'm not sure I even fully knew. Or maybe it's just changed over years."

He nods. I like him, closer up. He's not a natural hero or protagonist, but he's honest & there is a level way he has of speaking, moving, thinking.

"I envy you."

He laughs.

"You're young. You're in love."

"I'm your character. I'm you, chased through a few kinds of mirrors."

I nod. That's more a phrase I would use than Dylan.

"Shall I go?"

"Yes."

"Can we talk again?"

"Yah. It's OK now."

"Can I ask . . . "

"Yah."

"Is there more to this than me fucking Maya finally?"

I laugh. I shrug. He goes.

—followed him into the desert, & then ceased to follow, the songs leaving slowly, each song a named bit of my heart, for Maya, for Cordelia, for John, for others too, each leaving, slowly, & the apologies & the love chants, the many cries I'd known as my life until then—

I ceased to follow after a time, &
I ceased to look apart from stars

& mountains & ground
Ceased to worry on all I did not
& could not know of the world
Ceased to concern so much with
where I wasn't & what I wasn't—

The desert storm I walked into & through was a dream, a blinding emptiness, a force I resisted until I didn't—what was this? What was left?

Maybe panic—maybe—maybe I thought of the old man from back when—
"I'm with you, son"
"I don't know all this & I accept this."
"And you don't."
I nod.
"Good, because while you live & breathe, you'll fight on. Now turn around, you'll return here but not yet, not now. Turn!

Dylan lets go—hard, soft, deep, where the pain lasts, lets go, looks directly back at me & lets the fuck go—disintegrates but the last of him—

A room—crimson lit—dark wood, low, richly soft furniture—two voices—cohere & fuzz—

"Maybe he had the right idea. Some think so. But they want more. It's not about pleasure, or revenge, anymore. It's about departure."
"On their terms."
"Yes."
"But—"
"There is opposition?"
"And that?"
Holds a pink radio, shaped like a cat. "Yes."
"And?"
"She was bred for one purpose but now there's interference."
"How strong?"
He looks up, had been stroking the radio softly, thoughtfully.
"Some disagree we're past hope, past the choice for change. They let sentiment push for another answer."
"Well?"
"There's no return. No redemption."
"What is your plan?"
"Let them find each other. Let them all come together. Let our defenses weaken enough for this to happen when it would not otherwise. Let their union & collaboration & hope be built on what will undo them all."

xiv. (cvii.)

High on desert. Endless labyrinth to go.

High. On desert. Endless. Labyrinth to go.

High on desert endless. Labyrinth to. Go.

High, on desert, endless labyrinth, to go.

High on desert endless labyrinth to go.

High on. Desert endless. Labyrinth. To. Go.

The desert & the White Woods & the labyrinthine & *TripTown* & **RemoteLand** & the No-Tell are many glitters from the same stone. The Bridge of Glass. The roseate lit room. Luna T's Cafe. The Ampitheatre. Dreamland. Different musics sung by the same pipe, the same voice. The several scattered manuscripts of this book & its kin sheaf of poems, & other earlier, & perhaps later, manuscripts.

Maya & Dean are walking along the heavy trafficked avenue, a cold winter's afternoon fading, & Dean feels this is something other than he's known in a long time. This woman, still a girl somehow, but not completely, picked him for this. Whatever this is.
He asks again as they sit on a bench in a park where the homeless come, camp sometimes.
"Why me?"
"I've seen you before."
"Where? I don't remember you."
She hesitates. "You fucked me in a dream."
He stands, ready to run. "No! Hey! I never!" Starts to back away.
"Sit." Her word is quiet, seats him before he knows.
"It was you but not now, I don't know when. You were older, powerful. Clean."
He winces. "Hey. I do my best. Some of these people got veins like sewer holes. I only take my nips." Pauses. "Too many but only nips."
"I don't know what it was but when I saw you back there I knew you would protect me. I knew you would help me & protect me."
He looks deeply at her. Curiosity & fear.

"Genes & chance number up the world, between extinction & the long cry for a familiar god's knowable craft."
His mouth gapes.
"What were those hours between scents, between the chase & the cage? What else haunts blood & bones, & talks nightly in dreams?"
He stares in horror.
"You said that to me."
"I wrote that, Mary!"

"Maya."
"A long time ago."
"You said more."
"It's OK."
"Then you fucked me."
He flinches. The word from her lips hurts him. She doesn't like saying it but she needs his attention, needs him to *pay the fuck attention* right now, & on & on.
"What do you know about the White Woods?"
"Enough to stay away when I hear talk."
She frowns.
Dean breathes deeply. And again. Hasn't liked the taste of liquor in a long time. Thinking more & more of two things: the far past, & how to end this.

There was promise in the work he had done. Whatever vision this girl had, & whatever recognition she'd had of him back at that restaurant, she didn't know who he was, had been. She'd been drawn to him in part because he was not wholly gone, there remained a sniff of other years, of possibilities—
For awhile he had taught, not as a vocation but as a . . . laboratory for his ideas. He sent them out among his students to see what those eager minds might return to him. They assisted, they learned, it was exhilarating, if not what any of his colleagues was doing.

There seemed to come each new school year, one who would be his prize student, bound for great things only hinted at in classroom talk & papers—& another who would be his piece—bright, somewhat unmotivated—curious, lazy—looking for a thrill—over the years his seduction method streamlined from a dozen steps to a few—& he'd learned how to abort cleanly as well—

Such fucking hubris. Thinking he had things so easily controlled. Thinking a nice piece of young ass came as one of the pleasures afforded him for the work he did—

how Benny fucking laughed at him—
how Cosmic Early—
the open lanes to Dreamland closed—only a controlled few—
how that girl—

"Dean"
"Yes."
"We need to go."
They leave the park, walk along, he doesn't know where. He can't long protect a girl like this on the streets. She's a little scuffed but still cherry in some profound way. And Dean, who never sniffed a legal cherry in a nice pair of jeans he would not make a play for, bears no such interest in her.
Protect her. Protect Maya.
He stops. A crowded sidewalk, street corner, near an old large bookstore.
"Who are you?"
"I'm Maya."
"No. *Who* are you?"

"Maya."
"How do you know about the White Woods?"
"I was there."
Dean staggers a little & Maya catches him, strong grasp, leads him a little shaky into the bookstore, its cafe. They sit at a table among readers & laptop computers. She settles me down in my seat, gets me a cup of coffee, no, tea, I haven't tasted tea in a long time, coffee is what shelters & churches offer. She looks me over, mindful of others not because their opinions matter but for what danger they may bear. They're harmless, Maya, there is not an awake mind in this whole cafe. They read books like they eat food, their tastes exterior, bred into them, their reactions practically quantifiable, that predictable.

They *closed the fucking free lanes*! I want to scream this & I don't. Maya watches me but patiently. There is no guile in her, nor impatience for that matter.
I probably know where we have to go. "It's a town," I now speak aloud, softly, slowly. She leans nearer. "In the middle of the woods there is a clearing. In the middle of the clearing, in full moonlight when its temple becomes clearly outlined, there is a desert. Within the desert, its center & far reaches alike, there is a town." I close my mouth & ache to stop there. Ache not to say its name.

"Wytner. Wytner is *Trip Town*."

She stares. "It's where we have to go."

Some hours later I come to. New location. A room. A bed. Roseate light. Maya in a chair.

"You're safe. It's OK. I got us here. This is the Hotel Noah."

xv. (cvi.)

Rosie was the one who found them, Paula had wandered off. In truth, Paula had been entranced by the amanita muscarias but none of the others.

"Look, Rosie! They're like Smurf mushrooms!"

"Yah, P."

"But red not blue."

"Sure."

"Are there blue ones too?"

"Only in the cartoons."

"Oh."

She'd wandered off after that. Rosie kept looking, covering the ground & trees & bushy areas as systematically as she could. They were by a tree. Strangely, opposite sides. Rosie got a feeling as she suddenly saw the first, then almost accidentally the second.

Oh. Two.

Together somehow. (Together, somehow?)

I see them, I fall through it & see them, you, both of you, how you met

met? how mushrooms met?
No. For this moment, I see something, I see it clearly, I am with both you, there—

You, who? There . . . where?

You were young men, older than me but not as much as now—(?)
you were new to each other—
new to some world you'd both entered—

I saw you, I bound with you, with both of you, I bound you too—
something happened among us, I fell through—
it receded after this flash—for a long time—flash—this flash—
rainbow & lightning—

Preacher was no spy then—I was—or so the paycheck said—so we joked—it was a joke with a paycheck—waiting for something more—

No—I lived in that lunatic house of hers, that dirtbag room among many, for a reason, I'd been sent there—you just lived there—

Going forward in the story makes it no less sweet—but that first night we talked—we talked & talked & talked—that rooming house, the second floor, where the kitchen & bathroom were—we sat there drinking from a bottle I had with me, your Joe Camel coffee mug, my Mickey Mouse shot glass—your whiskey on rocks, mine neat—

Actually, Preacher, you cooked for me. I'd come up to use the can & nodded hello in passing.

"Nice smell."

He laughed. You laughed. Which?

"It's cheap pasta. Three boxes for a dollar. But I find things to add. Seasonings. Spicings."

Yah, you old fuck. You added pinches of psilocybin & cannabis, among others.

I nodded. "Mange" & smiled.

"Have you had your dinner?"

Shook my head no. Some nights I'd drink my fucking dinner & wash it down with a whore's long rented tongue.

"I always make too much. Every time. I start out famished, cook too much, & end up with some in that pail." Nods to garbage can.

So the bottle & tongue would both wait. I sat with you, let you fuss. Nobody else sat at that kitchen table to eat. The owner had her own apartment none of us ever saw. She was actually why I was there, but that's a less important story. I'd figured out what was going on in those unseen rooms. Pretty kinky shit. Well, sort of. What's really kinky in this world? Her niece in home porn movies, a whole set up. She was so coked up that she probably thought those men in masks fucking her in turns & groups really were some kind of über-daddy. I ended up doing something for her that helped, but, again, Preacher is setting a paper plate in front of me. No plates or silverware in that kitchen.

He was hungry way beyond the food in front of us. He was hurting. This sharing between us mattered. I didn't know why. We drank water from the sink until I fetched my bottle.

Did you even sip that night? I wonder. Did I refill your glass? Did the ice melt & the vessel overflow with unsipped drink?

Thing is, Preacher, I wasn't supposed to tell you *anything*. And I told you nearly all.

That girl. I remember how dead her eyes. How delicious that body. I sent her to a man, made her enter the building & go up to see him.

Shit. Which story. His or hers? Well, I suppose they were ongoing. That's what's strange.

I sent her to be cleaned by the man in the room full of stuffed animals.

"Will you love me if I go?"

"You need to be cleaned."

"*Will you love me*?"

I should not have answered you, much less made anything like a promise—but you wouldn't go—

"Bowie"

"No."

"Bowie!"

"No."

"Look at me."

"Christa."

She smiles. My heart drowns. She smiles.

"No."

"Yes."

"No!"

"Look at me!"

"How?"

"It's just for a minute."

"How?"

"Listen. Closely. I'm safe. I just want you to know that. I've learned how to do a few things. Like this."

"This?"

She smiles.

"I know you are deep in. I know what you're trying to do."

"What?"

"Save Preacher. Help Rosie. And more after that."

I start to cry. "I'm sorry. Did Gretta explain?"

"Some. But I found out more too."

"What?"

"I'm going to help you."

"Help me? No! Stay safe!"

"I can do both. Don't worry. You're not alone."

"Do you love me?"

Different eyes. The building with the man in the room of stuffed animals.

"Yes. Go."

Fuck. Would I like to take that back. You would not have become a spy like me.

Our conversation was tentative at first, though I enjoyed the food more than I had any meal for a long time. I think watching the girl get fucked over & over again on surveillance had finally gotten to me. I was losing track of something. Something really important. It wasn't written down for reference.

She kept getting purer for me. Each time. Later I'd beaten every one of them to death, I'd found them all, they are all dead, every one who had entered that room & touched her, & I made the landlady watch, bound, on a TV monitor, as I held court, as each one was brought in, chained, blindfolded, given his single hour to explain, then was castrated, out of the camera's view, by hour's end so heavily drugged that bleeding to death was an inevitable smiling path—

"You didn't do that, Bowie"

I confessed each one.
"Why did you do it?"
"No."
"No wife? No strip bar with a set of willing whores?"
"No."
"I'm going to clean her of each & every one of you. I'm going to scrape time off her."
"No."
I'd make them listen on headphones to the sounds each had made fucking her. I made each one feel how it felt. I injected into each an IV needle with a psychedelic cocktail of my own brew that transformed each gagged bound blindfolded man into a helpless, drugged girl, I'd tinkered with it until each man felt herself dressed for the evening in ribbons, in cotton, in costume, he felt herself waiting in the dank room with the cameras & lighting cues—he felt how his cock felt entering her—the ones who tried to jack hammer her into crying out & how she didn't, each man diminished into this, & the quick slice, & the bleeding out, & with each she was cleaner, & the landlady watched, on a monitor, each man who had paid her, sent to her from the hotel, its overflow, its too-demanding customers, its special cases with wallets thicker than any evil wish—

"No, Bowie, none of that"

Preacher had been appalled, beyond words, beyond anything. Bowie's room was like a secret command central of monitors & audio equipment, easy to uncase for surveillance & to re-case into his few possessions. Still monitoring. Every moment in sound & vision.

"She'll try to kill me too years from now."
"Who?"
"The girl. The one they're fucking in the landlady's back room. When I finally take it all down, & free her, & send her to that man to be cleaned up. It will happen eventually. She'll feel I took something from her worse than those men."
"I don't understand."
"It doesn't make sense. But, see, it does. We'll meet years from now, when she finds me, literally

becomes a spy to find me. She will approach me in a bar, as though casually. A rock club, one I will frequent then. I even have a lover, shit, more than a lover. Someone I feel for without a need for words. She will approach me one night, when I'm alone, when I'm restless, when I can't stay, when I can't fucking leave."

Preacher nods. Whatever this is, it needs to be said.

"I would not recognize her. You. I don't, at first. What I had stopped, those awful nights, I'd replaced, with other nights, the man who'd cleaned me. You left me with him, thinking I'd forget you eventually, the first man who was not paying to fuck me on film.

"Here's the thing. Any kind of life becomes what one knows, the worst of them. There were little things about that life, small things I liked, demands I made of my aunt, ways I came to more & more control what was going on. You felt I got purer as you surveilled, yet distrusted this truth, what a strange thought yet it came directly from your heart. It *was* truth. I fucked my way from victim to something else, I watched, I learned. These were businessmen, there were talking hours, I learned more as I went along, a question here & there. It was a familiar meal to a number of them, a trust between us. Did you watch all those hours of tape? Did you listen to the conversations after or did you see the fucking & miss the rest?

"I accepted you saving me because I was going to leave anyway & your way was blunter, less messy, & not my fault. So when I needed contacts years later, pieces in the path to find you, I knew people who would help me, friends of the men you killed."

"You are not going to kill them, Bowie," Preacher says quietly. Our meal is done, he steps away from the table to wash out his pot & return it to the communal dish cabinet. Is thorough, fusses this cleaning. Sits again, I've freshened his drink. Nods, go on.

"I tried to tell the man with the stuffed animals. He had his orders from you. Clean me up. I still wonder about all that. Brainwashing, hypnosis, psychedelic drugs. Sensory deprivation tanks.

"It would have worked if he had fucked me. It's really that simple. He wanted to. I understood men on that basis. I didn't have to fuck every one, but I did have to fuck every one who wanted me. Honestly, prick-crazy, wanted me. Bowie, did you notice which men kept coming & which didn't? I sorted through them. The ones who didn't want me I weeded out, made sure I wasn't what they wanted. If a passive girl, I came on hard; if hard sex, I lay back & took it, grunts & silence. The ones who wanted me I discovered, learned how to please, taught how to please me in return.

"But he would not fuck me. He was more afraid of you than he wanted me. I felt his heat *every fucking day* as he cleaned me up—

"See, that didn't help. I was young, I was attached to you & I figured I could fuck my way back you. You had *saved* me, but now you didn't *want* me? What the fuck was I for? I *was supposed to be yours*. I was supposed to fuck him over & over until he brought me to you. I would have done it. I knew him better than any had before because it was a mistake for him to take me. He'd done it for you. Done it for old kindnesses. You'd put him in that room. You'd understood him at a critical moment in his life & he owed you.

"It was wrong. It didn't work. I didn't fuck him & eventually I left there & I had to find you other ways & they were worse ways."

"Bowie," says Preacher, "I want you to listen to me now."

Bowie nods.

Preacher begins talking now, softly, maybe a primitive version of the way many to

come would knew him for. Spoke too softly, started & stopped too often.

"Whether yearn for a coupling or a coin, the din of days is the tapping of a heart's empty bowl for notice, for some token it can keep, some pittance will survive its miles, swathe its nights—"

Paused. Stopped. Damned stopped. Bowie listened.

"There are old promises, Bowie. One uncompleted that we never forget. She will feel that you do not complete that promise & will thus hold against you. What promise will you make her, Bowie?"

Bowie starts, does not say however. He knows.

They were partway from the aunt's house to the man in the room full of stuffed animals. Bowie was taking her there himself, then he was going to leave that city.

"I won't come with you, Bowie."

"No. Not yet. We will meet again sometime later."

They will sit somewhere together, a pause, a breath.

What promise?

"Do you love me?"

"Will you come for me soon?"

"Why can't I stay with you?"

"Take me somewhere & fuck me. You've wanted to every night you were watching. You don't intend to deliver me to anyone. You're going to 'clean' me with your own hard cock. Good. It's what I want to. You took my life away from me & now I'm yours."

"Do you love me?"

"Do you love me?"

"Do you love me?"

xvi. (cv.)

The night is cold & reminds me of a thousand other nights & surely this should be comfort & yet is not—

Tap. Tap. Nothing comes.

Tap. Tap. Try again.

Tap. Tap. I do not know.

Tap. Tap. I've never known.

Tap. Tap. Others claim.

Tap. Tap. Claim sure truth, sit at kitchen tables, stand high in pulpits, re-load guns, smile in the room's half-gloom & another go before sleep—

Tap. Tap.

Amid this curtained savagery, the lies explained as loyalty, discarding the man to keep the idea, *the hunger for orgasm even a full moon cannot sate*

& Art will not explain

& call tradition the praising of today's shit because it smells like another's—

Tap. Tap. Tap fucking tap.

How the spirit moves caged in a book read from a pulpit by a man who dreams of adding his come to the flames burning down the heathens' village—

What not tonight, what lack, how not like a thousand other nights?

"Brave talk of God's love as a mystery not a bondage. Brave talk of the world as gift & game enough for all. Brave talk of another in question & early morning curiosity.

"Tell me of a hope that does not rest dependent on another, or a despair that cannot be cut with a touch, a barking, hungry persistent word of empathy.

"Love's long blind reach into the dark."

Still, nothing.

Return not to this page or the next til something.

Something like the conviction that this desperately fucking matters & has to continue

I watched a strangely smiling man several days, the street corner through the window.

He was dressed ragged, one of his sneakers was crushed in its heel, he carried a filled plastic bag, a black plastic bag in his arms. I noticed him as I notice other poor folks, have for years.

The crushed heel. The strange smile. The black plastic bag in his arms. I watched him while the traffic light changed, then went along another way from his.

I could only think: this memory is, in true how to continue this, how to write this book necessarily—

But where his path other than a homeless shelter? What his bag but all of his possessions? What the connection here but my partly cerebral, partly emotive fascination with the destitute?

A friend of mine would say to me, in the depths of ancient drunks, in the far reaches of our ganja mullings, & other times too: "all is not as it seems."

Not a really comforting line, if chased along awhile. A threat to happy hours as well as suffering ones.

Parsed from another perspective, one could say that *much is as it seems* but *not all*—

I suppose I work best in the less or lesser places of uncertainty, where there is give, where not all is nailed down solidly.

A single line additional: Love's long blind reach into the dark. The power of love. The mystery of the world.

Tap. Tap. I do not know.

Tap. Tap. I've never known.

Tap. Tap. Others claim, & will fall.

Tap. Tap. Nothing comes. Try again.

What had Paula drawn that night, eating those shrooms with Rosie—

Bowie moved her hand for a long time, she drew beyond whatever she'd ever tried before, dreamed possible before, she felt her blood pressing hard toward her skin, through it as heat, a hard, almost crackling heat,

Rosie had laughed & mocked but then watched, quieted, this was not more of Paula's half-ass scribblings, Paula with something like a talent but no discipline, & no real deep ideas to follow along—

Here was Paula drawing from gut, from dreams, from places in her loins untouched by anyone—here was Paula seeing through time itself & Rosie——she——

xvii. (civ.)

There are traps, there are doors, sometimes they resemble each other,

Global Wall decides it's time & begins to plan. The subtle shifts with his girls give him enough confidence, not a lot but enough to work with. They need money; he left behind just about everything, money foremost, it being the blood trail that could be followed—

He thinks it over harder than anything else. To return to the stage: it must be done rightly, perfectly.

So much to say here. He now protects these three in a way he has never done with anyone, including himself. He protects them, he molds them, he teaches them. Their existence is huge in his life, brings him a peace, a sense of content he's never had. He does not understand it. Yet here is something that is powerful. They will see Benny Big Dreams as he has told them, but not in the way he'd intended.

He was going to leave them with Benny, hide them in Dreamland while he figured what next. He'd thought he could work better with them safely somewhere else. He'd been wrong. They'd taught him this.

The youngest one was not the betrayer he'd feared, but a powerful being. He'd learned it that night in that motel room, alone with her.

He was still not sure what had happened. She'd . . . taken him somewhere, shown him . . . more than what he knew. It came down to—this—

All his years had been a kind of arcing toward redemption, building a revenge that breached time.

It had failed but now he understood better why—

Said poorly: nothing goes away, nothing returns. He would never get back that youth, the then before he had been harmed. What had happened, had happened.

But—again put poorly—there were ways, other ways—in essence, use the pain, transfigure it—become what would by most reckings be impossible—change a past utterly—

More to it than that—it hurt his head to think—

In that room, that night, that perfect ass of hers, he'd been so deep, her biting his hand

as he thrust, hand cupped under her small tits, squeezing very hard, thrust, a moan, again, a moan,

or had he only seen this in her eyes?

or had those men been watching, some filming it?

Eventually it was morning & they were all curled together in their room, & the three waked all at once as they did, & tickled him awake, as they did, & cleaned up the room, as he'd taught, not a fingerprint, not a stray food wrapper, wipe it down like life itself was at stake, & then they showered, together, giggling, as he preferred, & the room was spotless, & they'd left, & he carried within him a lesson unlearned—for more days as well—until the middle one, dark-haired—

Hiding them with Benny, no, not a chance, he'd be much less without them, he would not make it & Benny would keep them—no—

The first group he spoke to was small, in a library meeting room, as a new author selling a book he only had an unpublished manuscript of—it will be out next month—we can take orders & ship them if any of you are interested—every one of them ordered at least one—

it was the girls & Global did not get the how of it—these were small-town blue-hairs, Sunday church & missionary position the night before—it was the girls because in truth he was no small town preacher or New Age hustler—he said heavy things in his heavy way—yet—

They dressed similar but not the same—they'd crawled over him like hungry puppies convincing him of this—he'd bought what they'd wanted—almost the last of their money—but when they girded him in that stuffy windowless, library meeting room—

And how had it come to be full? What had drawn that crowd? Global was not in charge anymore of these details—what he thought he knew was that they'd driven into town, got a motel room like usual, & while he though they all napped, these girls had—

but that made no sense—how could such young—

It was when he started to speak, ah, that Global Wall became himself again—all their efforts for this—they did not, could not, *didn't want to* affect this—it was the purpose—

He was thinner then the last time, so long ago, & his stage was a professor's podium, one he pushed aside almost immediately—& his purpose—what was it? The money? They liked ice cream, they needed socks, motel rooms & gasoline was expensive—no—yes but no—

He speaks. "If a dream of many moons in the sky, what else then? What more than sitting in festive groups staring one another for the hour's favorite quip? What not men among the roots?"

Pauses, Repeats, greater: "What not men among the roots?" Coheres a moment, his girls are nude around him, their long hair down, the blue-haired women gaped, some plainly drooling.

NO TRESPASSING
Property of Dominion

Blinks. No. they'd sitting near him, facing the audience as he is. Tis believed they are his daughters. Not said, not once, & none knew their names by his longtime instruction, but—

Resumes: "What not men among the roots? What new stars among ceaseless lonely want to fertilize the world with more?"

He'd dreamed these words, he was dreaming thousands of words these recent nights, they'd arranged this for him just to blood him of some of these words, he'd cry out in the night for their bloat—

The youngest has unbuttoned her amber jumper & white blouse, begins to dance near the first row, a slow deeply undulating dance, her white bra unhooked & half fallen, she lets a bluehair tug on it, teeth bared, angry, hungry, pulls it off greedily.

No! He breathes. All wait.

Speaks. "Many moons in the sky, in dreams & otherwise. More then celestial formulas or a guru's solemn-named day, else than the heated bestial grunts of age picking over youth's glinting bits."

He is sweating, breathing hard. All are listening, waiting, he has to hurry this a bit. It's been a long time, it wasn't like this.

"Waiting the foothold more luring than a new lover's thoughtful recline among shadows. The first word of the song stars know better than men." He nods, staggers, his girls catch him before anyone notices. Events happen, he loses track. They are back in the motel room, all naked together. There is a pile of cash money on the dresser. Their clothes are rinsed & neatly hung up. The room is not lit. There is quiet. They are close. They *must stay very close*.

xviii. (ciii.)

Acceleration of space, transformation of time, ah, that way this time then—Jazz nods, knows it's not so important either way—

She's had to assemble a plan with Ashleigh & the boy in tow—she rarely names him in her mind—calls him Toby to his face—

"That's not my name"

"It is when I say so"

He's scared of her still, but sometimes less—she shows him how she can hurt him without touching him—with just a smile—

"Say it"

"I'm Toby"

"Again"

"I'm—fucking—Toby!"

He won't break easily this one—but it's necessary—she needs more than a slave—she needs to break him & reinvent him—this won't happen easily—

Ashleigh is worse—is a mess—
"I don't see woods, Jazz."
"You don't see anything really"
"Why are you doing this?"
"I'm going to get you out of her. Toby is going to help. Then he gets a reward."
"Yes. That's all you'll say."

The problem is that they can't see what Jazz sees. They are watching the lie that is the made-up world around them. Like living in a TV show, living inside it completely, not knowing it's a fiction, she doesn't know how to unbind them—

She thinks of her hours, her nights with the Master, then tries to stop that, that does no good, & Toby is no help, like a decent sized cock attached to a brick, he'd fuck her if she wanted, but—& he'd fuck Ashleigh if Jazz let, but—

Oddly, more & more, she thinks of Global Wall, of what she could remember, is envious of what he built, probably evil as it was—

probably evil—ha—she'd like an hour with him—suck & fuck out his secrets of control, dominance, transformation—

"Jazz"
"What?"
"Do you have to do that?"
"What, Ash?"
"Lie in bed like that, naked, touching yourself all the time?"
"Want some?"
"No! God! What the fuck!"
"You'd be better than Toby."
"Jazz, shit!"
"I don't care if you watch or he does."
"He's terrified of you. He leaves when you do that. Honestly, don't you notice us?"
Jazz sits up. "Notice what? What have you ever done to notice?"
Ashleigh sits down on the bed, a hard old motel bed. "Jazzy, we have to go home."
"And where's that, Ash? Which way?"
Ashleigh says nothing for a moment. "I'm afraid of you too. I don't understand any of this."
"Which this?"
"What are we doing?"
"We're escaping the White Woods"
"Why is Toby with us?"
Jazz laughs. "You don't remember his name either. We should just call him 'dick on a stick.'"
"Why did we take him?"
"Because it could go worse, really bad. I don't know. He's big, & maybe he will be useful then."
"Jazzy."
"You don't know anything. You don't remember anything."
"The White Woods. Global Wall. They pretended to hurt you to fool me, so I would stay. A

prison of girls who were brainwashed to like it. Global Wall using them to build a momentum to cast back in time. A Beast. Maya."
"Yes. A Bridge of Glass. A TV show called *Trip Town*. A movie called **RemoteLand**."
"Jazz, I saw *Trip Town* once; it was dumb. Slow & made no sense."
"That's because you're fucking blind!"
"Why aren't you? Why did you get away? None of this makes sense! A hotel with no roof? An old writer you might have fucked while sleeping to get you here? A Master?"

Acceleration of time. Transformation of space. Takes awhile but now sometimes Ashleigh too lies naked across the bed. Toby hesitates, still leaves. He's not there yet.

Jazz tells a story, a simple one, to push Ashleigh beyond her perceptual blindness. It has to be possible. She could be an allie but she has to *see*—

"There was a man & a girl."
"Did you know them?"
"No, Ash. It's a story. Listen."
"This wine is sweet. Don't you want some?"
"No. Just listen."
"OK. A man & a girl. Sounds about right for you, Jazzy."
"I was sitting in a restaurant."
"You were?"
"Watching them outside on the street corner."
"When?"
"It doesn't matter. Just listen."
"OK. I'm sorry."
"I watched them talk then part. He walked across the street. She hurried down the sidewalk. Neither looked back."
"Oh."
"As though that easy."
"Yah."
"I watched it happen over & over."
"Oh."
"I sat there & watched them part each other over & over."
"Oh. What do you mean?"
"Over & over. I watched them."
"You said that, Jazz."
"Over & over."
"OK. Yes."
"I watched them part over & over."
"Yes, Jazz."
"Close your eyes, Ash."
"OK."
"Now sit with me in that restaurant."
"OK."

"Are you there with me?"
"What does it look like?"
"Big windows. A street corner. Pancakes with strawberrys."
"I love those!"
"Lots of milk & sugar in your coffee."
"Yes!"
"Now look out the window."
"To the street?"
"To those two. The man & the girl."
"Where?"
"Look. Relax. You've finished your pancakes & coffee. We both look out the window. We see the man & girl talking."
"Is she pretty? What is she wearing?"
"Long blonde hair. A light blue dress. Ankle boots."
"I see her! She looks like you!"
"Yes. She looks like me."
"But how?"
"You sit with me here & see me out there."
"I don't know."
"You do."
"I do."
"I want you to say something three times for me, Ashleigh."
"OK."
"Acceleration of time. Transformation of space."
"Acceleration of time. Transformation of space."
"Again."
"Acceleration of time. Transformation of space."
"Again."
"Acceleration of time. Transformation of space."
"Do you see me out there?"
"Yes. I see you."
"Do you see me sitting with you in the restaurant?"
"Yes. I see you."
"Both?"
"Yes. No. It's not both, Jazz. You are here. You are there. But it's not both. There's one of you."
"Yes. Can you hear me as we speak here in this restaurant?"
"Yes, of course."
"Can you hear me as I stand on that street corner talking to that man?"
"I . . . yes. Of course."
"What am I saying?"
"You are telling him goodbye. But—"
"But what, Ash?"
"You don't believe this, do you?"
"No. I don't. Why am I saying this?"
"You . . . you need him to despair . . . for awhile. You need him to live & act in this despair for

a time. Till you return."
"Why am I doing this?"
"I don't know, Jazz. I'm sorry."
"Now open your eyes, Ashleigh."
"Oh. Holy shit! What was that!"
"You're starting to see."
"*What was that?*"
Jazz smiles, a real smile, first in a long time. Well now. Well, well.

xix. (cii.)

I'm in. It took me more to do this than I can say or anyone can know. I have ideas about this place. I don't know if I'm right or could even figure this out.

Hotel Noah. No-tell. I know the different names. The rumors. They say the help is all homeless & recovering addicts, they live in a segregated part of the building, can't leave without permission, some not at all.

The room is—let me start before that. I'm writing this down. I haven't done that in a long time. I used to do it, it was my work, my calling, my fucking passion.

Then I did it more often with the bottle in hand. Then it was the bottled without the writing.

And, for awhile now, the bottle's been gone. I finally stopped cold but it was ending long before that. Like it was ticking down & I just had to wait.

I was a reporter. That's what this is about, probably, mostly. Not all, but I was a reporter. I was good, for awhile I was really good. Then it got weird. Got weirder & I began writing with the bottle nearby, & so on through as I've already said.

Thing is, I knew I had a . . . thing for the . . . other side of daylight. I was a good reporter because people talked to me when they thought reporters were toxic or just shit.

I had an empathy. I saw people's suffering & had a way of working with it. It won me respect, some friends, some snitches, a few lovers. A few . . . others.

I knew about the place back when it really was just about whores & coke. I was here a few times. Yah. I was. I say it here. I liked whores. Didn't like coke as much but sometimes the two went together.

It was the booze not the coke that dragged me low. And it wasn't the booze save to keep me numb from the weird shit. What then. What was all that?

See, what all that *was* is what all this *is*. This place wasn't weird. The weirdness came here, with the money, the renovations. The addicts & whores were here first, now they staff the place as maids & janitors & doormen & kitchen help & so on. It was a shrewd thing to do. Bring the weirdness in, give it a big pretty house & don't kick out the previous shit-eaten tenants. *Hire them. House them. Pay them well.* They'll keep mum about what they see so their own pasts stay buried. It's a subtle, devilish arrangement. Staff the lunatic asylum with former patients.

So I'm not here unnoticed. Nobody holds against me here. I'm remembered as a guy who was an easy touch for a dollar & never gave away a source. I wasn't one of them, but I was OK.

Thing is, what I'm really wondering about, do they know what's going on here? Do

they see it, feel it? Some of them? They must. Or maybe not. Dogs are loyal no matter the master's ways. So maybe but nobody would tell if I asked. Hate me a little for trying.

The room is—see I saw how it all was coming together. That Red Dog place. Global Wall's speeches. I saw it. Here's the problem. When he bought me finally, I misunderstood the price.

And I know she's here tonight, somewhere in this place, or somewhere related. She's never left, he never intended her to, not with me, not ever, & I don't think she did.

She's not why I'm back but she's not irrelevant. No, see I lost something or, fuck, maybe everything here & here is where I've come to reclaim it. She may be part of that. I don't know yet.

The room is—why do I feel compelled to write "transformation of time, acceleration of space"?

Put it another way: maybe just to delay finishing that damned sentence: my dad told me a story, maybe more than once, it seemed to guide him or explain something to him about how the way things work.

First him with the bottle, then years later we shared. We didn't make it to when it would have been just him with the bottle again.

He'd pause, the story would always come on him deep in a drunk, sometimes as a crescendo, sometimes it would just bust right into the middle of things, but either way it's like it would possess him & he had to tell, do its will, he breathed by its leave & would tell. Something. Fuck. How many times did he tell it?

"A man smiled & leaned against another man, said, 'this is my land, brother, but I'll hire you to work it for me.'" He'd sip from his drink, or pull at one of those thin Cuban rum cigars he'd get. Tasted like dung to me. Next bit of the story was for me. "The second man heard his baby crying & checked his options. None." One time I really pissed him off by saying that "none" with him. "Asked his pay."

Now it could have ended there. I mean, a moron could get the point but he strode on, every time. The story breathed him in & out & he just damn well strode on.

"No freedom in working another man's land as he counts. Nor freedom in striking him down!" He'd get ruddy-faced, spittle flying. Like I needed persuading, didn't agree.

"Freedom's not found in a coin or a crown or a cross." Sometimes he'd add "or a cunt" or substitute that for one of the others. What that it, no. Course not.

"Freedom's hour come when none above, none below," & he'd finish off the drink & pour him or us another.

The room I'm in is where we slept together. I haven't seen her since I woke up from that dream & she was gone. Her, her clothes, her things. Even her scent, none of it in the air, or the bedclothes. I woke up from that dream as though I'd gone to sleep in that bed alone, checked in to that room alone, no girl, no lover, nothing.

I looked for her, I ate my career whole & spit it out friend by friend, contact by

contact, favor by favor, but nobody remembered her, remembered me with her. Nobody. The whores, the addicts, the bell boys, the maids.

I look at what I've written here & see that I've said those old days were weird & that the weirdness came later. Can both be true?

She was a gift for what I did for him. Really, what I didn't do because of him. I left something out, something damning. In return, he gave her to me. It seemed to be what all three of us wanted.

I couldn't get near him after that. Of course, I actually set it up, as the favor to him. I hadn't wanted to see him again so I'd destroyed our ties. I had her. He had what he wanted.

What I didn't know was whether or not it was his choice or hers. I couldn't know. It was a betrayal of two by one or one by two.

I think of my dad's boozy old story because this being here again is about freedom. I'm not sure.

Of course earlier I wrote I was pretty sure she didn't intend to leave with me either but I always dig into that & remember our last conversation & that dream.

I remember it was the most peaceful sleep I had in a long, long time. Freedom, Dad, that's what it was. Freedom from dreams, just sleep. And if I woke I'd feel her warm flesh, her deep breathing, the knowledge, if I needed more, that she was sleeping exhausted & happy from how hard I'd fucked her. She was *mine*. *Finally*. That last night there weren't any others.

It wasn't like the price was easy. I sold something out to him for it, for that freedom, for me, for her. He needed to disappear his operation completely & I had access to the people, to the *mechanics* of disappearing.

She passed between us as payment, as what purchased my actions, or, really, my lack of them. I knew what he was doing. I knew that he could not erase his trail completely. I knew what last steps he intended to take, & how to make them fail. I failed to act, or, rather, I acted slowly. In the time I delayed, he was delivering her to me.

She wasn't as happy as I'd thought she'd be. I figured she was tired, though it didn't stop me fucking her. I must have thought I was inventing fucking that night, or reinventing it. I would have fucked her kneecaps & ankles if I could have. I probably tried.

Later on, I let myself wonder if being exchanged like that troubled her. If she resented me. She was payment, what I demanded. A shapely piece of coin.

No. That last conversation. That dream.

xx. (ci.)

She told me, you told me, you'd met a man not long ago who was looking for a girl, not you, no, he didn't look twice at you that way—he knew who—he didn't know where—

How did you meet?

It was somewhere, maybe several.

This made no sense. I listen again, but it's what you said.

Her name is Maya, he told me. He didn't like to say her name, didn't offer it up. But I asked, & he twitched, & he said. It's like he had to answer if asked.

This made no sense, either, but it's what you said next.

That's when I wanted you to stop, a little. Maybe I remembered something, about a man, about a girl. Maybe I was fucking paranoid as fuck. You were with me, here, this same

fucking room, this bed.

Shit. Now I can smell you. It wasn't the perfumes, all that arty flowery shit. No it was the smell of you when you were sweaty & exhausted from fucking. From loving. The smell in your hair when it got dirty, when I told you I wanted you not to shower all day, go around a little bit ripe, & think about me showering you that night with my tongue, every golden inch—

fuck fuck fuck——

Maya—it was when you said the word *Maya*—you didn't know—that's what I'm still trying to figure out—you were there—in the White Woods—Global Wall's secret empire of young pussy—but it fell away, all of it, that night, piece by piece—

He told me it would—

She won't remember—she'll remember other things—just listen, nod, it won't be hard to fill it in—she's with you, she loves you, she's happy—

He told me that but it was the story—I'd pretty much fucked you til then—at first our talk was fragmented—

til that story—*do I have to learn this again? Are you here? Did you ever leave?*

He seemed so lost. He was going to find her but he didn't know where she was. How do you do that?

I rolled you over on your stomach, I spread your ass cheeks, my cock deep slipped very slowly inside your ass & you moaned & you protested & you moaned again, I pushed in deeper, into your very tightness there, my hands helping you to spread your ass wider for me, & a very softly spoken word *dontcum* & you lurched because you were so close—*so fucking close o god it feels good—o god o god dontcum no please yes o god o god fingers find your wet bare cunt & did things to it, several things to it o god o god o god dontcum O God O God O God O God*

I was dreaming somewhere far where breezes blew cleanly & constantly all day *& I was at my canvases, I was slowly reversing something I'd gone too far I had to undo there was too much blood too much I'd overshot—*

A radio played a lecture broadcast from the ships overhead: *"The need to fuck, the need to piss, the breathing, the beating, the fury toward what beauty these autumnal hours—"*

Dontcum Dontcum Dontcum
o god o god o god o god o god
When I finally let you relax on the bed, & positioned myself over you that my cock could enter your ass as my hands crushed your tits, & the word came then, words, but they were not mine & I could not stop them, they were what did all this to me

Find Maya. Protect her.

I pushed your head full into the pillow & I fucked you for over an hour til there were no whimpers or resistance. When I woke up you were gone & I had two things: that dream of the ships overhead, & your instruction.

There are others here, & nearby. Tonight I am saying, love, I am no longer hesitating. I will find Maya. I will protect her. What are the ships overhead? Where are you tonight?

To be continued in Cenacle | *79* | *October 2011*

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Joe Ciccone

Last Night

I was presented with the reality of God.
In the 11th hour I knew he was there—
The world rocked and rattled in my ears,
Everything screamed around me, my bed was boiling.
I was forced to confront Him,
And He was far less forgiving than advertised.

Something peeled my eyes open—
A horror of white light—
The bones of my father!

I made a plea for guidance and protection
While my priests ran to their quarters,
Sealing themselves up like dolls in their chests.
Who was to come but my neighbor Insanity—
I listened to his song.
I must keep mended the wall that divides us.

* * * * * *

Ric Amante

She's Like A Rainbow

Red is your tongue and it flickers in my mouth
a joyful bird a restless snake an electric quiver—
feel how we glide—vessels of flesh and weightlessness.
Hard your clasp your grasp your fire—
fires of joy, joys of fusion.
We emerge peaceful, bold, tasted.

The leaves were orange and shaped like questions
so I asked you to fling your unknowns before me
I asked you to show me the risks and rewards.
Or the leaves were questions and shaped like oranges
I really couldn't say I was beside myself
sitting beside you for the very first time.

Everyday the sun everyday your intelligence
a lovely old star and a lovely old soul
both easy to honor and a blessing to fathom.
Your insight is solar, concise, why not yellow
with the same shining power and grace
to favor harmony over strife.

How many springtimes have you marveled at green,
how many more shades do you gather today?
Out on the pond your creaturely eyes
scan pine-tops for herons, log-ends for turtles.
Closer to the season deeper into green
eternity enters your bloodstream.

You're my deep blue anchor,
not blue as sad but as alchemic
bond and paradox—
an anchor without chains
connecting me to the man
I am becoming—with you.

Exotic, internal indigo
your private girl language
it floats to the pebbled ceiling
to pop on a seahorse chandelier.
You trust me with it all—
our horizons reinvent.

Your face freshens and soars under violet light
warmth and wonder pool in your gaze
you attend the world without guile—
downward-facing dog, upward-facing goddess.
Purple is your field your aura your way of being—
your invitation to warriors or doves.

* * * * * *

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Paul Krassner

My Acid Trip with Groucho: See the Sacred Word and Win $100

[Essay]

Orginally published in High Times*, February 1981*

"Always stay in your own movie."
—Ken Kesey

If you take the name of a certain former vice president, Spiro Agnew, and scramble the letters around, you can rearrange it to spell out Grow A Penis. Such appropriateness can give your boundaries of coincidence permanent stretch marks. After all, when Sen. Charles Goodell came out against the war in Vietnam, it was Agnew who called him "the Christine Jorgensen (the first famous transsexual) of the Republican Party"—thus equating military might with the mere presence of a cock.

Years ago, when Mike Wallace interviewed me for *60 Minutes* and asked about the difference between the underground press and the mainstream media, I told him about the above anagram and said, "The difference is that I could print that in *The Realist*, but it'll be edited out of this program."

My prediction was accurate, so naturally I took an immediate vow never to appear on any TV show again unstoned. Which in turn explains why eating magic mushrooms was practically a prerequisite for my being interviewed by Tom Snyder.

Now, Andy Friendly had only been doing his job when he was reading the "Sex and Dope" issue of *High Times* in September 1978. As a producer for the *Tomorrow Show*, he was always on the lookout for potential guests, and there was a particularly bizarre interview with me in that issue, so he called up to invite me on the show.

There were a few follow-up phone conversations to explore areas that the televised interview might cover. The subject of drug use came up, and I said, "Well, maybe we could talk about my old psychedelic macho. I've taken LSD in all kinds of unusual situations: when I testified at the Chicago Conspiracy trial; on the Johnny Carson show (Orson Bean was guest host); I was sort of a guide for Groucho Marx once; [and] while I was researching the Manson case I took acid with a few women in the family, including Squeaky Fromme and Sandra Good. It was a kind of participatory journalism . . . "

The interview was scheduled for November 30.

"That's my birthday," said Abbie Hoffman, still on the lam at the time. "Would you wish me a happy birthday on the show?"

The *Tomorrow Show* flew me from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and a chauffeured limousine delivered me to a fancy hotel, where I proceeded to partake of those magic

mushrooms. My mood was intensely sensual. What I really wanted was an exquisite massage. I called an old friend who is a professional masseuse.

Since she was also an old lover, it was not totally surprising that we began fucking on the bed before she even set up her table. She finally broke the sweet silence of our post-coital afterglow with this whisper: "But I'll have to charge you for the massage."

November 1978 was the month of that unspeakable Jonestown Massacre and, a week later, the political assassination of San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and gay supervisor Harvey Milk, by ex-cop Dan White. The mushrooms were really coming on strong when Tom Snyder—who has an FM mind in an AM body, and was apparently doing his impression of *Saturday Night Live's* Dan Aykroyd doing him—asked me, in effect, to *justify* San Francisco as the locale of such sequential horror.

"Nyah, nyah" I began, "my city's more violent than yours . . . "

When he asked me about the trip with Groucho, I replied, "Well, there's a whole context" but, due to the demands of televised pacing, we barely got into it before Snyder wanted to know about my six months as publisher of *Hustler*, and what it was I said to the Hare Krishna pusher sat the airport. Just before the show ended, though, I managed to remember to wish Abbie Hoffman a happy birthday.

Recently, a *High Times* editor recalled seeing that interview on TV, and invited me to write the story, which finally completes this media cycle.

The Timothy Leary Connection

Think of this as a piece of combat history. To fully understand the context in which this battle for the will has been taking place, you need only retrace the chronological profile of G. Gordon Liddy, from his role as a Poughkeepsie district attorney who raided the Millbrook mansion where LSD was an experimental sacrament, to his function as a CIA operative who offered to assassinate Jack Anderson on behalf of the Nixon Administration.

Had Liddy been given the go-ahead, columnist Anderson wouldn't have been around to embarrass the Carter Administration into not invading Iran, and we might be in the middle of World War III at this very moment.

In 1963, in my capacity as editor and Zen bastard of the *Realist*, I had assigned Robert Anton Wilson to investigate the game being played at Millbrook. In my capacity as standup comic and drug virgin, I had been poking fun at all the highs I'd never tried.

Wilson came back and presented me with our cover story, "Timothy Leary and His Psychological H-Bomb." After it was published, Leary called to invite me for a weekend at Millbrook. Working with him were Ralph Metzner and Richard Alpert. Somehow, despite all the accoutrements of Eastern religion, the scene was quite American. Even this top level of the psychedelic hierarchy consisted of a Catholic, a Protestant, and a Jew.

Yet they were performing a cosmic task, this trio of Ph.D. dropouts, helping to spread the expansion of consciousness in the middle of a sadomasochistic empire whose perpetuation depended upon the mass contraction of consciousness.

Originally, the CIA had intended to use LSD as one more means of manipulating the population. That scenario backfired. A generation who trusted their friends more than their government deprogrammed themselves from the society that had shaped them, and then reprogrammed themselves, into an infinite variety of incarnations.

The think tanks had not formulated a contingency plan for this counterculture that was refusing to be brainwashed into becoming consumer and military zombies. This mutation would certainly have to be discredited.

LSD influenced music, painting, spirituality, and the stock market. Tim Leary let me listen in on a call from a Wall Street broker thanking him for turning him onto acid, because it had given him the courage to sell short.

Leary had a certain sense of pride about famous folks he and his associates had introduced to the magic potion. Cary Grant had become a father at age 74, thanks to LSD and, likewise, Herman Kahn of the Hudson Institute now talked about "spasms" of information.

Years later, I gave Kahn a superficial tour of the Lower East Side. We stopped in a bookstore. Among this thinker of the unthinkable's purchases was *LSD and Problem Solving* by Peter Stafford.

Meanwhile, I had become a gung-ho acidhead, a public propagandist. I wrote a lot about LSD. Sometimes I would take a tab right onstage at the beginning of a performance, verbally sharing my journey with the audience—hoping I could get a few laughs while simultaneously maintaining my juggling act, without dropping any chromosomes and damaging them.

The Charles Manson Connection

There's a new-wave band whose name Sharon Tate's Baby is a tribute to time warps everywhere. For it is now nearly a dozen years since Charles Manson, a victim-executioner sired by the prison system, dispatched his perverted commune to mutilate and kill a group of people in the privacy of their home. Among the slain was Sharon Tate, a pregnant actress.

Her husband, Roman Polanski, director of *Rosemary's Baby*, was out of the country at the time. Now he is out of the country again, this time to avoid prosecution for consorting with a voluptuous 13-year old.

Young idealists on their way to the Woodstock Festival that weekend in the summer of '69 kept passing newsstands with headlines of the gory multiple-murder. Not all the details emerged. Others dead:

- Jay Sebring—hairdresser, dealer of marijuana and cocaine earlier that evening, a member of a coke ring had appeared at the house—his body would later be found stuffed in a car trunk in New York
- Voytelc Frokowski—who, with Sebring, was preparing to become U.S. distributors of MDA
- Abigail Forger—coffee heiress, girl friend of Frokowski and campaigner for Tom Bradley, L.A's first black mayor—she was a far cry from the conservative image of Mrs. Olson in her father's TV commercials.

Manson was an eclectic. He borrowed techniques from Transactional Analysis and Scientology alike. There was even a Scientology E-Meter (lie detector) on the blind man's ranch where Charlie kept his harem. He used sex and music and isolation and ritual and fakery—whatever worked. He was a pimp and a hypnotist. He dispensed LSD tablets as though they were time-released Dog Yummies.

I interviewed Preston Guillory, who had been a deputy with the Los Angeles Sheriff's

Groucho Marx

Department when they eventually busted the Manson ranch. He stated that before the murders, they had been told to leave Charlie alone—despite complaints about his violations of parole (including, ironically, statutory rape)—because "something big was coming down."

"Why were you given such an order?"

"I don't know," Guillory replied. "We didn't question our superiors."

"Did you at least *speculate* as to the reason?"

"Oh, we just figured they were gonna kill Black Panthers."

Thus did the racism of the sheriffs render them collaborators of Charles Manson, who had wanted to start a race war. He instructed his followers to leave clues making it appear that black militants were responsible for the killing. When the family was arrested, however, it merely served to give hippies a bad name.

Before Willie Nelson made the look respectable again, there was John Linley Frasier, a long-haired, head-banded freak in the Santa Cruz mountains who was involved in an awesome mass murder a year after Charles Manson. He later became a prison-mate of Manson, mentioning in a letter that "me and Charlie are still trying to figure out how long our leashes were and who's been pissin' on them . . ."

And so it came to pass that Charles Manson was stuck in solitary confinement at Folsom Prison when a new inmate was placed in the adjoining cell. It was Tim Leary, fresh from being hounded around the world. He was eventually captured with Joanna Harcourt Smith, who later admitted working for the Drug Enforcement Agency.

"They took you off the streets," Manson informed Leary, "so that I could continue with your work."

Charlie couldn't understand how Leary had given so many people acid without trying to "control" them. Still, I remember a certain vested interest Leary had in having been a catalyst for their transformation. He enjoyed whatever influence he had wielded in the change of attitude toward LSD that Henry Luce had brought to *Time* and *Life.*

But, Leary once remarked, "I consider Otto Preminger one of our failures."

The Otto Preminger Connection

The FBI has been getting a bad press lately. They were being accused of hounding Jean Seberg to suicide. Documents proved they had spread a story that she was pregnant by a leader of the Black Panther Party. Then, in order to *defend* itself, the FBI released their tape of a tapped phone conversation wherein Jean Seberg tells a surprised Panther how pleased he should be that she's carrying his baby.

It is enough to make the left and right lobes of your brain start humping each other. What will the next layer of reality be? Will yet another document reveal that the Black Panther was actually an undercover agent?

But the FBI was not the first to toy with Jean Seberg's destiny. She was originally chosen from among thousands of contestants by Otto Preminger for the starring role in his film *Joan of Arc.* While she was being burned at the stake her garments actually did catch on fire. Jean Seberg screamed with such a passion for survival at that moment, it seemed to preclude the possibility of ever taking her own life.

And Otto Preminger, bless his professional heart, knew that this was one scene he had on the first take.

I've met Preminger on two occasions. The first was in 1960. I was conducting a panel on censorship for *Playboy*. Preminger had defied Hollywood's official seal of approval by not censoring *The Moon Is Blue.* In retrospect it hardly looks courageous but Preminger refused to take out the word "virgin."

Anyway, at the end of our interview, he asked, "Ven you tronscripe dis vill you fix op my Henglish?" "Oh sure," I replied quickly. "Of course."

He glared at me and shouted, "Vy? Vot's drong viz my Henglish?"

The second time I saw Preminger was a decade later. We were both guests on the Merv Griffin Show (Orson Bean was guest host again). I had taken mescaline for the occasion. Another guest was comedian Jackie Vernon. Responding to the length of my hair, he said, "Why don't you take a nice bath?"

Nobody had ever asked me that on network television before. Later, Monday morning quarterbacking, George Carlin would have an Aikido-like suggestion: "You should've said, 'Why, thank you, Jackie, I hadn't considered that'"—but at that instant I was caught off balance and just kept silent. So did the audience. The tension was broken by Otto Preminger.

"Dot iss duh seekness ov our society, dis stereo-typical ottitood."

Now the audience applauded. And then we went to a commercial. There is a definite rhythm a director brings to a TV talk show . . .

Between those two occasions, Otto Preminger made a movie called *Skidoo.* It was pro-acid propaganda thinly disguised as a comedy adventure.

And the part of God was played by Groucho Marx. Recently, Tim Leary cheerfully admitted to me: "I was fooled by Otto Preminger. He was much hipper than I was."

The Lenny Bruce Connection

Steve Allen became the first subscriber to the *Realist* in l958. He sent in several gift subscriptions, including one for Lenny Bruce, who was busy fighting the press label "sick comic." Lenny and I developed a close friendship. In 1962, *Playboy* assigned me as editor of his autobiography *How to Talk Dirty and Influence People*, which they were serializing.

Traveling around with Lenny Bruce was an incredible delight. It was a theatrical education to watch him sculpt his offstage perceptions into onstage routines. But, as his environment became more and more the courtroom, so did the contradictions of the law become more and more the canvas for his craft.

Although Lenny was a tremendous influence on me as a performer, I was not at all into drugs at the time. Once I asked him about the apparent inconsistency between his free-form lifestyle and his having to stop everything in order to shoot up. He replied, "Well, you stop to eat, don't you?"

He described heroin: "It's like kissing God." And who could fault him for that?

In the winter of 1964, stoned on a combination of DMT and LSD, Lenny fell backward through the window of his San Francisco hotel room. At the precise moment that he was suspended in midair, he uttered: "Man shall rise above the rule!" Then he surrendered to the law of gravity and plummeted to the sidewalk below. Both legs had to be put in casts and for a while he became the Hermit of Hollywood Hills.

Around that time, Jerry Hopkins—who had opened the first head shop in L.A., and later became the biographer of both Elvis Presley and Jim Morrison—was producing the *Steve*

Allen Show. He arranged for me to do a one-night stand at the Steve Allen Theater. Lenny Bruce was in the audience, and so was Groucho Marx.

At one point in the show, I was talking about the importance of having empathy for other people's perversions.. During a question-and-answer session that followed, Lenny stood up on his crutches and asked what I had meant by that.

"Well, once I was sitting in the subway—it was rush hour and really crowded—and an elderly lady's buttocks kept rubbing against my shoulder, and I began to get aroused . . ."

"You're sick!" Lenny yelled.

"Thank you, Mr. President," I responded, ending the show right there.

Later, I met Groucho Marx for the first time.

"That was very smart, the way you finished," he said. "Besides, I was getting fidgety in my seat."

The Ram Dass Connection

By the mid '60s I had become such a dope fiend that I kept my entire stash in a bank-vault deposit box. Once a week I would don my Cosa Nostra sweatshirt ("We aim to please!") and get my supply of LSD—to give away, sell, swallow, whatever.

It was, for you brand-name fans, Owsley White Lightning—300 micrograms of separate reality. I bought my acid from Dick Alpert to finance his trip to India, where his guru renamed him Baba Ram Dass. "Come fuck the universe with me," his postcard beckoned, but I already had an American guru—Mortimer Snerd, ventriloquist Edgar Bergen's dummy. One time Bergen asked his main dummy, Charlie McCarthy "What are you doing?" Charlie answered, "Nothing." And then Mortimer Snerd said in his goofy bucktooth country bumpkin style, "Well, how d'ya know when yer finished?"

Anyway Ram Dass kept seeking illumination and having his feet kissed by strangers, while I stayed at home and got a call from Groucho Marx.

He was going to be in an Otto Preminger film called *Skidoo*, and it was pretty much advocating LSD, and he had never tried it, but was not only curious, but also felt a responsibility to his audience not to steer them wrong, so could I get him some pure stuff, and would I care to accompany him on the trip?

I did not play hard to get.

The acid with which Ram Dass—in his final moments as Dick Alpert—failed to get his guru higher, was the same acid that I had the honor of taking with Groucho Marx. As I left the bank vault that week, I was breathing slowly and deeply so that I would not laugh my ass off in the lobby.

The Groucho Marx Connection

We ingested those little white tabs one afternoon at the home of an actress in Beverly Hills.

Groucho was interested in the social background of the drug. There were two items that particularly tickled his fancy.

One was about the day acid was outlawed. Hippies were standing around the streets waiting for the exact appointed minute to strike so they could all publicly swallow their LSD

the exact second it became illegal.

The other was how the tour bus would pass through Haight-Ashbury and passengers would try to take snapshots of the local alien creatures, who in turn would hold mirrors up to the bus windows so that the tourists would see themselves focusing their cameras.

I told Groucho about the first thing I ever sold to the old *Steve Allen Show*. It was a sketch called "Unsung Heroes of Television." Among the heroes was the individual whose sole job it was to listen intently the whole half hour for somebody to say the secret word on *You Bet your Life*, and then to drop that decoy duck when the word was said.

He told me about one of his favorite contestants: "a gentleman with white hair, on in years, but a chipper fellow. I inquired as to what he did to retain his sunny disposition. 'Well, I'll tell you, Groucho,' he says, 'every morning I get up and I make a choice to be happy that day.'"

We had long periods of silence and of listening to music. I was accustomed to playing rock 'n' roll while tripping, but the record collection here was all classical and Broadway show albums. After we heard the Bach *Cantata No. 7*, Groucho said, "I may be Jewish, but I was seeing the most beautiful visions of Gothic cathedrals. Do you think Bach *knew* he was doing that?"

Later, we were listening to the score of a musical comedy *Fanny* There was one song called "Welcome Home," where the lyrics go something like, "Welcome home, says the clock," and the chair says, "Welcome home," and so do various other pieces of furniture. Groucho started acting out each line, as if he were actually being greeted by the duck, the chair, and so forth. He was like a child, charmed by his own ability to respond to the music that way.

There was a point when our conversation somehow got into a negative space. Groucho was equally bitter about institutions such as marriage ("like quicksand") and individuals such as Lyndon Johnson ("that potato-head"). Eventually, I asked, "What gives you hope?"

Groucho thought for a moment. Then he said just one word out loud: "People."

After a while, he started chuckling to himself. I hesitated to interrupt his revelry. Finally he spoke: "I'm really getting quite a kick out of this notion of playing God like a dirty old man in *Skidoo*. You wanna know why? Do you realize that irreverence and reverence are the *same thing*?"

"Always?"

"If they're not, then it's a misuse of your power to make people laugh"

And right after he said that, his eyes began to tear.

When he came back from peeing, he said, "Everybody is waiting for miracles to happen. The human body is a goddamn miracle."

He mentioned, "I had a little crush on Marilyn Monroe when we were making *Love Happy.* I remember I got a hard-on just talking to her on the set."

During a little snack: "I never thought eating a fig would be the biggest thrill of my life."

He held and smelled a cigar for a long time but never smoked it.

"Everybody has their own Laurel and Hardy," he mused. "A miniature Laurel and Hardy, one on each shoulder. Your little Oliver Hardy bawls you out. He says, 'Well, this is a fine mess you've gotten us into.' And your little Stan Laurel gets all weepy: 'Oh, Ollie, I couldn't help it. I'm sorry, I did the best I could . . . '"

Five years later, my book, *How a Satirical Editor Became a Yippie Conspirator in Ten*

Easy Years, was published by Putnam. Editor William Targ sent an advance copy to Groucho, and he sent back a postcard that was as eerie as it was complimentary: "Thanks for the book. I am sending this card to you, because I don't know where Mr. Krassner lives. Or even if he is alive. At any rate, it's a hilarious book and I predict in time he will wind up as the only live Lenny Bruce."

The year after that, I was heavy into my Manson investigation. During the acid trip with three of his family members—Squeaky Fromme, Sandra Good, and Brenda McCann—I got an even more awesome compliment.

Sandy Good had once seen me perform at The Committee in San Francisco. Now she was saying to me, "When people used to ask me what Charlie was like, I would compare him to Lenny Bruce and Paul Krassner."

My heart thumped rather strangely.

Sandy had been a civil-rights activist. But Charlie Manson stepped on her eyeglasses, threw away her birth control pills, remolded her personality, and transformed her value system. So now she was parroting Charlie's racism and asking me to tell John Lennon that he should get rid of Yoko Ono and "marry his own kind."

I've never met Charlie Manson, although I've corresponded with him. But I have heard a tape of his rap, and he definitely used humor as a tool for evil.

For the first time I understood in my guts what Groucho Marx had meant about misusing the power to make people laugh.

The Jerry Rubin Connection

After our acid trip, I had only a couple of contacts with Groucho.

The first concerned a rumor that he had said "I think the only hope this country has is Nixon's assassination." I wanted to verify whether he had actually said that.

"I deny everything," he joked, then admitting he had indeed said it over a luncheon interview with a now defunct magazine, *Flash.*

"Uh, sorry, Mr. Marx, you're under arrest for threatening the life of the president. I can't tell you how much I enjoyed *A Night at the Opera.* Here, now, if you'll just slip into these plastic handcuffs . . . "

I wrote to the San Francisco office of the U.S. Department of Justice, asking about the status of the case against Groucho, particularly in view of the indictment of Black Panther David Hilliard for using similar rhetoric. Here's the reply I received:

> Dear Mr. Krassner:
>
> Responding to your inquiry, the United States Supreme Court has held that Title 18 U.S.C., Section 87) prohibits only "true" threats. It is one thing to say "I" (or we) will kill Richard Nixon when you are the leader of an organization which advocates killing people and overthrowing the government; it is quite another to utter the words which are attributed to Mr. Marx, an alleged comedian. It was the opinion of

> both myself and the United States Attorney in Los Angeles (where Marx's words were alleged to have been uttered) that the latter utterance did not constitute a "true" threat.
>
> Very truly yours,
> /s/, /James L. Browning Jr. United States Attorney

The second occasion was at the Los Angeles Book Fair in 1976, where Groucho was scheduled to speak, along with Tim Leary and Jerry Rubin.

Leary was dressed all in white except for a black string tie. He was now advocating suburban space colonies.

"Migration," he proclaimed, "is the number one tool of the DNA code."

There was speculation that this might really be a metaphor about the way we ought to behave on earth. Utopian planning for life on a celestial way station is bound to serve as a model for people changing themselves, their institutions, and systems on our own planet, whether or not we actually start sending out satellites covered with Astroturf.

Leary took a slight swipe at Rubin, mentioning an ex-radical who said, "Kill your parents," and had now written a book on how to contact your deceased parents through astral travel. Rubin had issued a press release requesting the media not to refer to him as a former Yippie leader. Somewhere there must have been a headline: FORMER YIPPIE LEADER ASKS NOT TO BE CALLED FORMER YIPPIE LEADER.

A few years previously, Jerry Rubin had helped organize a press conference to denounce Tim Leary as a snitch, although Leary insisted that he never got anybody in trouble. Now Rubin was scheduled to appear at the Book Fair on the same evening as Leary, but he rearranged it for the next evening in order to avoid a public confrontation—or, worse yet, a public embrace—in front of all those eagerly popping flashbulbs.

Nevertheless, Jerry Rubin served as a unifier at the Book Fair.

It had been announced that Groucho Marx would not speak from the stage in the Ambassador Hotel ballroom, but rather on a one-to-one basis with folks whose books he would be autographing. This turned into a mob scene. So Jerry found Groucho's companion, Erin Fleming, and suggested that if they walked back around a certain way it would bring them directly onto the stage. She followed his advice.

Groucho looked frail and unsmiling, but he was alert and irreverent as the audience fired questions at him.

Was he working on a film now?

"No," I'm answering silly questions.

What was his favorite film?

"Duck Soup."

Nixon?

"He should be in jail."

Is humor an important issue in the presidential campaign?

"Get your finger out of your mouth."

What does he dream about?

"Not about you."

What inspired him to write?

"A fountain pen; a piece of paper."

I couldn't stand it any longer.

I called out, "Groucho, what gives you hope?"

This time he said, "The world."

There was hardly any standing room left in the auditorium, but one man sat on the floor rather than take the seat occupied by a rubber Groucho Marx doll.

* * * * * *

Scriptor Press

Independent Publishing Since 1995

Scriptor Press is an independent press founded in 1995 in Cambridge, MA. Scriptor Press publishes the quarterly literary magazine *The Cenacle*; the *RaiBooks* literary chapbooks series; & an annual *Sampler* of selected works. It also hosts the quarterly meetings of the Jellicle Literary Guild.

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SCRIPTOR PRESS

NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Ric Amante lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in the pages of *The Cenacle*. We hunkered down recently with Ciccone & the years gone by seemed heavier & utterly weightless, both.

Charlie Beyer lives in Belize. We met years ago at the Burning Man Arts Festival, when he was distributing *The Detonator*, & now, years later, he is a welcomed new contributor to *The Cenacle*.

Joe Ciccone lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in the pages of *The Cenacle*. His new poem in this issue is, he tells, a terrifying middle-of-the-night true story.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her work can be found online at: http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams. Her recent spate of haiku brings this periodical ever closer to flight.

Paul Krassner was born in 1932. From 1958 to 2001, he edited & published the seminal countercultural journal, *The Realist*. He was also a Merry Prankster & a Yippie. *The Realist* Archive Project can be found online at: http://www.ep.tc/realist.

Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her website is http://rollwiththechanges.org. Recently we've agreed: though we are distant in geography, happiest friends in Art.

Jamie Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His photo in this issue is his first contribution to *The Cenacle*. He is also a musician & a carpenter.

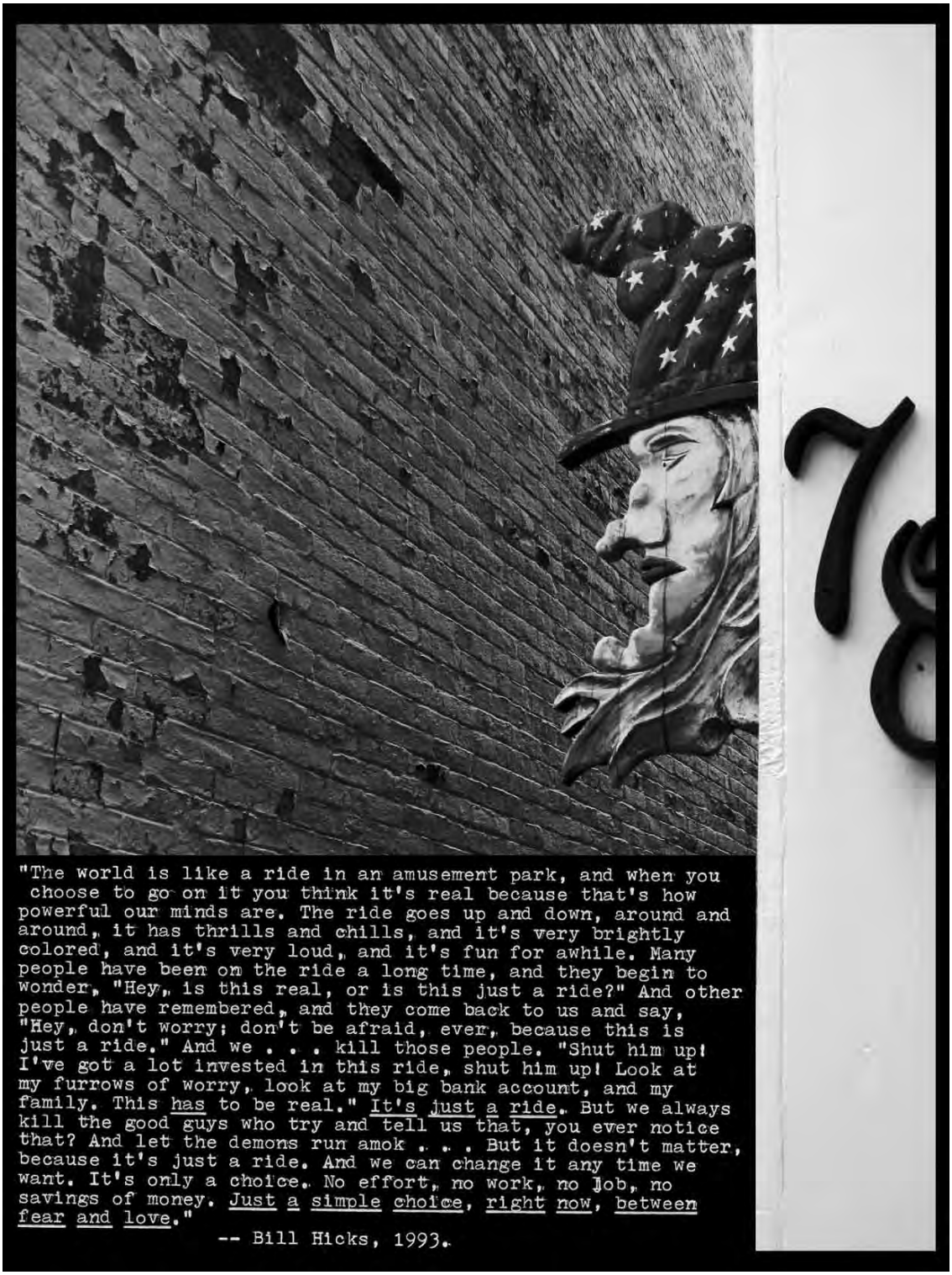
Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. I keep thinking that one day I'll sit this man down to figure better the what & why of his mighty poems.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Arlington, Massachusetts. She calls her pieces shown on this issue's cover "microllages," a word she coined for them.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Arlington, Massachusetts. Employed again, the ante of course raises for doing good by loved ones & the world. A resolution & the will to do. *Yes*.

Henry David Thoreau was born in Concord, Massachusetts in 1817, & died there in 1862. *Walden* stands as one of the major works of world literature. It was also excerpted by Scriptor Press in 2000 as part of its Burning Man Books Series.

* * * * * *



"The world is like a ride in an amusement park, and when you choose to go on it you think it's real because that's how powerful our minds are. The ride goes up and down, around and around, it has thrills and chills, and it's very brightly colored, and it's very loud, and it's fun for awhile. Many people have been on the ride a long time, and they begin to wonder, "Hey, is this real, or is this just a ride?" And other people have remembered, and they come back to us and say, "Hey, don't worry; don't be afraid, ever, because this is just a ride." And we . . . kill those people. "Shut him up! I've got a lot invested in this ride, shut him up! Look at my furrows of worry, look at my big bank account, and my family. This has to be real." It's just a ride. But we always kill the good guys who try and tell us that, you ever notice that? And let the demons run amok . . . But it doesn't matter, because it's just a ride. And we can change it any time we want. It's only a choice. No effort, no work, no job, no savings of money. Just a simple choice, right now, between fear and love."

-- Bill Hicks, 1993.